CINEMATIC MONSTROSITIES, LITERARY MODERNISMS

by

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(Under the Direction of JED RASULA)

ABSTRACT

In *Cinematic Monstrosity, Literary Modernisms*, I examine the horrific representations that result when the work of American literary modernisms intersect with monster movies and horror film. Monster and horror movies as literary representations function as emblems of the legacy of literary "high modernism" and the "shock" of the modernist intervention on the American literary corpus. This monstrous engagement is expressed as an ambivalent preoccupation with the traumas of modern war and the formal and conceptual symptoms of modernism, as well as a deployment of allusions to the syntax and semantics of the modern horror film. My central literary exhibits will be Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Pynchon, Brett Easton Ellis, and Don Delillo. These examples are joined together here primarily by their deployment of monster- and horror-movie technique, imagery, or context to stage various levels of commentary on form and on literary authorship as well as to rehearse and confront the psychic horror of modern warfare and the violence implied or promised by technological innovation.

INDEX WORDS: Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Pynchon, Brett Easton Ellis, Don Delillo, horror film, monster movies, *Psycho*, *Dracula* [film], *Frankenstein* [film], *White Zombie*, James Whale, Tod Browning.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Wren Bramblett Rogers, in celebration of her joyous birth on 11 September 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

I propose that cinematic representations of monstrosity provide a crucial component to any understanding of literary modernism and the legacy of that modern intervention at work in contemporary American novels. In *Cinematic Monstrosity, Literary Modernisms*, I will examine the horrific representations that result when the work of American literary modernisms intersect with monster movies and horror film. I argue that monster and horror movies as literary representations function as emblems of the legacy of literary "high modernism," and that they come to embody not only the "shock" of the modernist intervention on the American literary corpus but also the "crisis of representation" at the center of that intervention. This monstrous engagement is expressed as an ambivalent preoccupation with the traumas of modern war and the formal and conceptual symptoms of modernism, as well as a deployment of allusions to the syntax and semantics of the modern horror film. The word *shock* might here act as a conceptual or emotional link between art-horror like *Nosferatu* and the various visual and literary modernisms (and its post-war iterations via postmodernism et cetera); if the former exists as aesthetic reactions to (or enactments of) the "shock of the new," the latter is more simply calibrated to "shock" its audiences.

The monstrous is a concept rooted in the body, and has served a variety of social ends: establishing, through an oppositional figure, embodied national and cultural identity; expressing both the desire for and the repercussions of social taboo; dramatizing (or rehearsing) contact with the forbidden and the unknown; and exaggerating the ambient fears and repressed neuroses of a people in a form which allows those repressions to be safely acknowledged. Because the monster is a *body-thing,* it will be observed at work in the text in one of two ways: as a *figure* in the text, be it allegorical, allusive, or an actual agent of the plot, and as an expression of the formal properties of the text itself—that is, as a characteristic of the "body" of the text in question. My central literary exhibits will be Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Pynchon, Brett Easton Ellis, and Don DeLillo. These examples are joined together here primarily by their deployment of monster- and horror-movie technique, imagery, or context to stage various levels of commentary on form and on literary authorship as well as to rehearse and confront the psychic horror of modern warfare and the violence implied or promised by technological innovation. However, I would argue that they share other traits more loosely, and that a kind of generic pattern can emerge that I will hereafterlabel a *monstrous novel*.

This project thus includes American reactions to the "High Modernisms" of the 1910s and 1920s (via West, Barnes), those contemporary novelists whose work so often marks the temporal or literary event wherein the break between modern and postmodern can be identified (Pynchon) or who nevertheless "regress" into the aesthetico-ideological agenda of the late moderns via what David Foster Wallace has called "hyperrealism" (Ellis, DeLillo): as Frederic Jameson puts it, postmodernity is "unable to divest itself of the supreme value of innovation…. the new fetish of Difference continues to overlap the older one of the New, even if the two are not altogether coterminous" (Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 55). So we will shorthand the

above mentioned authors of this-or-that literary movement as simply one of many "modernisms" since the First World War.

   The 1920s and 1930s whence we begin all of this modernism-ing was the same time period that saw the development and institutionalization of monster pictures as a *form* or as a *genre*. Between the world wars, the monster, creature, or (to some purists) horror film emerged in its so-called Golden Age with films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919)*, Frankenstein* (1932), and *Dracula* (1936). The rise of filmic horror then can be attributed to the need for a new artistic form to express the new ways of being-in-the-world that this period of history introduced.[1] Jameson is useful again here: "Political and social experience both enable and limit scientific research and invention, rather than the other way round, as most intellectual histories presuppose. A new form must first emerge in the concrete realm of social relations before it can be transferred to more specialized domains of productive and intellectual life" (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 105). The subsequent fluctuations and mutations of modernism that would develop on the literary scene in the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. the development of postmodernism as a literary "style", and the re-visiting of the modernist aesthetic agenda that followed, also feature a corollary in the explosion of horror- and monster films that accompanied the VHS/home-movie

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[1]   Certainly these authors are aware of the literary sources for monster movies like *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and others, but I will elide a discussion of these literary roots and make a distinction between them and *filmic* horror. In this way I can consolidate these works in relationship to modernism (as opposed to Gothic Romanticism, classical antiquity, *et cetera*). If modernism was initially marked as a break from on the one side realism and the language strategies and legacies of romanticism on the other, than this distinction between the cinematic monstrous and the gothic, literary monster is even more pertinent to my thesis. I make an exception in the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, wherein a discussion of the Minotaur is inseparable from the cinematic images of horror which Pynchon deploys.

revolution (these later years might more accurately belong to the *slasher* than to the *monster*, but we shall treat the two as a the same figure for my purposes here).

The literary touchstone that would lend itself as the seminal text for a study such as mine would be either *Ulysses* (1922) or Moby *Dick* (1851). The former I will sidestep in an attempt to limit the scope of my inquiry to American authors and film traditions, though it is an awkward maneuver around a work that relies on both popular media and mythological beasts to organize its material. *Ulysses* nevertheless stands as the operative exemplar of the formally challenging and generically hybrid works that will fall under the scrutiny of this dissertation. It is simply impossible to imagine Barnes – and of course, Pynchon and later Ellis – without Joyce.[2] *Moby Dick* would better fall into our purview were it not for the anachronism presented by its debut: Melville's novel preceded the advent of cinema by about forty years, and therefore yoking it to the techniques of horror-cinema is a lost cause. *Moby Dick* nevertheless haunts all of the works of my study (most notably in the Pynchon chapter, as many critics are at pains to hold Pynchon to the standards of Melville and Joyce). While *Moby Dick* may not be able to claim any literal relationship with the motion picture industry, I would argue that the book can be considered a kind of proto-monster movie, and that its fate is bound up in the generative processes that will constitute the American movie-monster tradition and mytho-chronology that I depend upon in my study. That is to say, *Moby Dick* was becoming the great American novel under the same forces which produced the monstrous novels of this dissertation. Consider that the novel at first

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[2] Attentive readers will see that *American Psycho* is a postmodern re-enactment of *Ulysses*, engaged in the same polyphony, grotesquery, and regionalism/historicism as Joyce's novel. It is also I believe a parody of that novel (just as it parodies and "monstrifies" the New York financial community which is its subject).

remained obscure, except in certain English literary circles, and that a series of Melville "revivals" later brought *The Whale* to cultural prominence. These revivals were heralded by war and the ensuing artistic modernisms that were created in the wake of that bloodshed.

The first "reappraisal" period began around 1917 through the critic Carl Van Doren; this initial Melville revival "gathered momentum" in 1919 and lasted through about 1925 – roughly around the birth of the monster film via the German Expressionist films like *Caligari* and *Nosferatu*. (Parker and Harrison xvi). Around 1923, D. H. Lawrence managed to reach backwards into time and pull Melville into the post-war aesthetic program of the modernists with relative ease – and at the same time proceeded to paint Melville in a portrait as monstrous as the harpooner Queequeg must have seemed to his shipmates: "It is no use pretending that Melville writes like a straightforward, whole human being. He is hardly a human being at all. He gives events in the light of their extreme reality: mechanical, material, a semi-coherent dream-rendering. What the futurists have tried hard to do …Melville [has] pretty well succeeded in doing for them" (Lawrence, qtd. in Parker and Harrison 133). Lawrence attributes to American literature the same tropes that will characterize the monstrous novel as it persists into the twenty-first century: "American art symbolizes the destruction, decomposition, mechanizing of the fallen degrees of consciousness" (Parker and Harrison 132). F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* would begin the second "great" Melville revival and reappraisal of the book just one year before the Americans entered World War II. By the atomic age it was cemented as a giant-monster extraordinaire.

The formal properties of the novel that contribute to its monstrosity – its hybrid aggregation of unlike generic and narrative components, the resulting "incomprehensibility" or unknowability which such an aggregate produces, its seeming immensity, and its tendency

towards reveling in excess – are neatly reproduced in the text through what seem almost to be
allegorical figures and devices. Ahab is a kind of monster-man, constructed ("forged") of ill-
fitting components and who is presented as having visible seams wherein these pieces have been
joined (I am thinking here not only of his ivory leg but also the scar which runs down the length
of his body).[3] On a larger scale, the crew of *The Pequod* is a heterogeneous bunch of ethnic
caricatures, "savages," and animal-men, and the whaling ship itself is variously described as a
ship, a village, a factory, a slaughterhouse, and an actual whale ("the entire ship seems a great
leviathan himself", 357). So just as Ishmael narrates the process of dissecting and rendering a
whale for its blubber, bones, and spermaceti, so too does he "dissect" and render visible the parts
of the ship and the work of whaling itself, further complicating the hermeneutic "levels" of the
monstrous allegory and therefore the likeness of the work as a sort of fictional chimera. As the
London *Athenaeum* put it in 1851, *The Whale* is "an ill-compounded mixture" (Parker and
Harrison 7).[4]

Queequeg personifies the incomprehensibility and "unnatural" difference which *Moby Dick*
as a novel seemed to also inhabit. His teeth are filed, his body heavily and comprehensively
tattooed, and he is an accomplished cannibal. Queequeg thus not only has a monstrous body but
one that is associated with transgression ("taboo") and incomprehensible signification

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[3]   Ahab's visible seams can afford us an opportunity, like Lawrence's above, to dialectically reach
backwards and revise his signifying practices as embodied information, iconic not only of the nineteenth
century's rational, scientific, and industrial enterprise but also already the informational body of the
posthuman "cyborg".

[4]   To be exact, it is "an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact."

("tattoo").[5] He is an 'alien,' and an accomplished crosser-of boundaries. He has left his savage

ways to investigate the world of Christendom, for instance, and later he will distinguish himself

amongst his crew for most successfully being able to cross into the world of the dead: he dives

into cold water to save one man from drowning; dives into a Sperm Whale's head to save the

harpooner Tashtego from drowning in whale-oil; and later survives a terrible fever –for which he

has built his own coffin. The white whale Moby Dick offers a monstrosity more associated with

the natural world in that it is an immense creature who "terrorizes" the seas as a completely

inhuman force; so while Ahab and Queequeg are iterations of the kind of monster archetypes

which are defined by cultural values, Moby Dick is simply a giant beast more akin to something

like a natural disaster. He is of course also "malformed" in being an albino and for having a

twisted and scarred hump-back. In these central figures the novel rehearses its monstrous and

horrific "self."

   To be overly simplistic: one could consider Ahab to be something like a co-mingling of

Frankenstein's monster and Dracula; the animal-men of the ship (the harpooner Fedallah, for

instance) to be akin to atavistic figures like werewolves and the rat-like *Nosferatu*; Queequeg to

be any of the many monstrous figures inspired by contact with exotic, savage, or repulsive "other

races" of human like the Morlocks of H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*, the Eastern European

vampire figure like Bela Lugosi's performance of *Dracula*, the various living-dead iterations of

movie mummies, or even the entirely reptilian gill-man from *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

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[5]   Queequeg's body-work could place him in the tradition of later nineteenth century spectacular bodies

and American oddities like Tom Thumb, Chang & Eng, et cetera. He thus becomes part of the archetype

that will inform the emphasis on "freakery" in other works in this study, anticipating for instance the

homosexual tattooed strongman Nikka from *Nightwood*..

A one-to-one correspondence here is not my aim, but rather the suggestion that the influence of *Moby Dick* on American "literary" authorship might contain embedded in its ether archetypical figures of monstrosity that would seem to have resonated in these later cinematic works, thus bridging a gap (or *suggesting a bridge*) between the "literary" aspirations of the various "modernisms" I examine in this study and the more sensational iterations of monster movies. An author caught between the desire to make a "new" literary work and the gravitational pull of the trend toward cinematic "seeing" (and therefore writing) may therefore be drawn to monstrous figures of hybridity, degeneration, abjection, and repulsion as models for both content and form.

Generically speaking, then, the works examined in this dissertation seem cousin to Melville's encyclopedic whaling yarn. It is the "encyclopedic novel" as asserted by Edward Mendelson that may be of use in terms of establishing a kind of genre tradition in these monstrous novels. Mendelson argued that works like *Don Quixote*, the *Commedia* of Dante, *Ulysses, Moby Dick* and *Gravity's Rainbow* as examples of the form; as it were, Pynchon's novel inspired Mendelson's taxonomic work.[6] He describes the formal behaviors of Encyclopedic narrative but also stipulates that they are historically dependent, and that they therefore exist : encyclopedic novels, for instance, render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge; make extensive use of synecdoche; present a full account of some technology of represent scientific knowledge specific examples; use epic structure as "organizing skeleton" but change the period from the "legendary past" to the near past; function as prophecy and satire; assume an indeterminate form or incorporate multiple narrative forms; offer a full variety of

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[6] Rather, "Our distance and our proximity to the thought of encyclopedic narrative is patently linked to the publication date of Pynchon's novel [1974]" (Rasula, "Textual Indigence").

literary styles and an account of some art outside of fiction (Mendelson 1269-1270). Furthermore, "all encyclopedias provide an image of their own scale by including giants or gigantism" (1273). Novels that I will describe as monstrous will include the encyclopedic examples from this dissertation—*Gravity's Rainbow*, *Against the Day*, and *American Psycho*— as well as some that fall outside of the scope of this study: DeLillo's *Underworld*, for instance, and certainly *Infinite Jest*. A kind of inter-generic Venn diagram forms between the encyclopedic narrative and the monstrous novel, and that intersection includes a *desire to repulse*: "No one could suppose that any encyclopedic narrative is an attractive or comfortable work. Like the giants whose histories they include, all encyclopedias are monstrous" (Mendelson 1272). Encyclopedic fictions, like encyclopedias, are by definition a site of combinatory aggregates that exceed the "bounds of the known" even in their attempt at documenting those bounds; monstrous novels, like monsters of antiquity, police those boundaries and embody both the existence of those boundaries of the known and their transgression.

This group of subjects also includes authors who wrote scripts for Hollywood, authors who wrote about life in Hollywood, and authors who rely on popular art forms (especially film) to tell stories set in California and on the west coast. Authors who have lived in the "cinematic" west (and the surrounding areas of California) tend both to produce novels that feature monstrous figures and characters, these works themselves significantly influenced by the monster films of their respective periods, and to craft novels which themselves bear physical or formal traces of monstrosity or gigantism. Writers like Nathanael West and William Faulkner had moved to Hollywood to ply their trades and earn some money while their more natural offspring—their novels—collected dust on the shelves or fell further and further out of print. As movie monsters took on more iconographic status, and as motion pictures became more and more often the

dominant mode of popular narrative, postmodern novelists like Thomas Pynchon and Brett Easton Ellis consistently referred to genre pictures and monster movies to not only blur the distinctions between elite and popular culture in their work but also to amplify and resonate thematic preoccupation within their novels (Pynchon's examination of modernity's "love affair with death," Ellis on the traumas of over consumption and formal exhaustion). Ellis's debut novel *Less Than Zero* takes place in Hollywood, and locates that city as one given over to a life determined by the amoral video-horrors of the image-industry. Pynchon's *Vineland* takes place in a modern day northern California colonized by the movie industry (one character laments "ever since George Lucas's crew came and went, there's been a real change of consciousness") and by the ever-present glow of the television "tube" that re-cycles old films and regurgitates made-for-TV pabulum —e.g. Pia Zadora in *the Clara Bow Story* (Pynchon 7, 15). So the motion picture industry itself is often on display in the monstrous novel alongside the monstrous archetypes it delivered into the popular imagination.

Part of my thesis, then, is that the literary establishment viewed Hollywood as a great Other, and the resulting co-mingling of literary talent and Hollywood degeneration as unnatural and debased.[7] This view came to being in an atmosphere of horror films and cinematic monstrosity; thus, physical (literal) and moral (figurative) monsters populate the signature works of these artists. I propose that the concept of the author as literary genius—the cult of the genius or seer— so prevalently associated with late modernism (and of modernist ideology in general) experienced a kind of mortal threat in the rise of cinema as a form of popular entertainment, not only because of the great mass appeal of cinema (one that threatened to eclipse the novel as the

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[7]   "Why don't you get out of that *ghastly* place? You're an artist and really have no business there…"— Edmund Wilson to Nathanael West, 1939 (Dardis 174, emphasis added).

dominant narrative form) but also and more precisely because the collective or collaborative nature of screen writing threatened the cultural authority of the "literary genius" and the stability of cultural hierarchy and order. Barbara Creed, discussing feminine figures of monstrosity in horror, inadvertently describes the influence and function of the horror film on literary modernism: "…the concept of the border is central to the construction of the monstrous in horror film… Although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous remains the same—to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability" (Creed 11). Cinema threatened the stability of literature; Hollywood's transformation from boom town into one of the centers of global modernity hastened this process of narrative and cultural instability. Where the town once represented a kind of cultural slumming, it now became a Babylon of the global market.[8] Authors working within and inspired by this region and industry thus felt their work to be "tainted" by its blood, and their works persistently offer images of bodily and supernatural horror.

Another ideological component to the narrative of late modernism appears in the critical imperative to make art separate and distinct from popular culture. As Fredric Jameson argues in *A Singular Modernity*, the autonomy of the aesthetic is achieved by "the radical disjunction and separation of literature and art from culture":

> …what is called culture in all its forms is rather an identification of the aesthetic with this or that type of daily life. It is therefore from culture that art as such — high art, great art, however you wish to celebrate it – must be differentiated; and this operation takes place historically at the very beginning of the television age, when what will later on be stigmatized as mass culture is in its infancy… if one opens the door to 'culture,'

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[8]   The reggae artist Norris Man reminds us that "Babylon a Vampire."

everything currently *reviled* under the term of cultural studies pours in and leaves pure art

and pure literature irredeemably *tainted*. (Jameson, *Singular Modernity* 117)

Note that this opening into popular culture results in works being "tainted" and "reviled"—that

standing order is violated by the presence the abject or otherwise transgressive object or act.

Such an action or agent of course is the monster itself; thus, the "popular" texts at the center of

my discussion — those texts wherein Hollywood, screenwriting, genre pictures, rock and roll,

the drug/protest culture of San Francisco and indeed the very state of California itself – are coded

as horrific, monstrous, or otherwise in violation of a dominant "standing order" wherein art is

sublimated and autonomized and culture is "bad culture, mass culture, commercial culture"

(Jameson 179).

Critical context

    The literary ecosystems and conglomerations to which my exhibits belong have variously

been sounded according to chronological and generic approaches. Period studies like Tim

Armstrong's *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (1998), or James Woods's essays on the

"hysterical realism" of Pynchon, DeLillo, Rushdie, et al in *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter

and the Novel* (2004) both contain a lot of the material which I exam herein. Wood examines

what he sees as a lack of sincerity and therefore a lack of engagement with the human in the

"hysterical realism" of the late postmoderns; I agree that there is an inhuman force at work in

these works, but find in this "inhuman element" the moral engagement he finds lacking.

Armstrong's volume organizes Barnes and West together in its investigations into prosthetics

and gender**,** but there has not been an organized investigation into the films as invested in the

filmic image of monstrosity. Nancy Bombaci groups these two novelists together with the film *Freaks In Late Modernist American Culture: Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Tod Browning, And Carson McCullers*. Her investigation into the images of freaks and freakery in the 1930s certainly paves the way for my study, and I agree that the "movement towards postmodernism in the works of Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Tod Browning, and Carson McCullers is marked by an acceptance of disteleology, anarchy, and degeneration associated with racial and ethnic outsiders" (Bombaci 1). I more specifically focus on that program as dialogue occurring between monster- and horror-cinema and literary reactions to modernism, and one in which the freakish body is specifically interrogated in relationship to cinema and post-cinematic modernism.

   The critical work produced by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen on the subject of monstrosity has been of great influence on this project. He has written extensively about the concept of the monster as an element of identity formation in England in the Middle Ages, and reminds us that "Medieval races of monsters—cynocephali, pygmies, etc—are "simply 'that which shows' (Isidore) or 'that which warns' (Augustine), a morally and physically deformed creature arriving to demarcate the boundary beyond which lies the unintelligible, the inhuman. (Cohen xiv)." Cohen concentrates on the hybridity of monsters (horse-men, dog-headed men, etc) as illustrative of the cultural mixtures necessary in forming a nationalist union out of the many tribes and peoples of medieval England: "[to historians Gildas and Bede] …there also lurked the haunting knowledge that the world is combinative and complicated. …Between imagined or desired absolutes… flourished recalcitrant impurities. In the wake of conquest as well as of less martial kinds of cultural encounter, fusions of difference inevitably arise." (Cohen 2006: 1). I extend this emphasis on monstrous *physical* hybridity into the notion of a monstrous formal hybridity, in that many of the works who undertake this strange combination of cinematic monsters and literary heritage

often do so in works that are formally heterogeneous, unusual in size, or incongruous in assembly. This is especially in the works of Thomas Pynchon, but will be as obvious in Ellis's *American Psycho.*[9] Cohen argues that the depiction of foreign monsters in the middle ages represented the limits of a nation and a people, and therefore were not only entirely outside of that community but also integral to that community's sense of self: "The monster can embody the abject… Yet the monster can also offer a body through which can be dreamed the dangerous contours of an identity that refuses assimilation and purity" (Cohen 2006: 6). So I will argue along the way that these works are integral to the understanding of a national, post-modern literature by way of shaping the outer contours of that literary state. The very sounding of the depths of that literature is both the purpose behind these works and the resulting "physical" expression via the obstructive and purposefully "difficult" forms the works take. Monstrosity is both their *form* and their *content.*

Along the way I will define the various functions and iterations of *the monster* and its role as a warning to transgressors and as a transgression of nature in and of itself. Because I argue that these novels were inspired by monster films, I will necessarily turn to film criticism and especially horror film "theory" to inform my thesis and to better immerse these works in a critical matrix which is itself *hybrid*. There is no shortage of criticism on horror film and monster movies. For this project, I am particularly indebted to the works the work on art-horror from the boom of psychoanalytic film criticism that dominated film criticism since the nineteen seventies. This would include works by Robin Wood, Carol Clover, Stephen Neale, Linda Williams, Barbara Creed, and Noël Carroll. Stephen Jay Schneider observes in his anthology *The Horror*

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9   Were this project less limited in scope, I would include in this list of chimerical works Dos Passo's *USA*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and most of William S. Burroughs's fiction.

Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmares that this is not simply reflective of the general inclination in film studies towards a model of spectator identification and fantasy fulfillment proposed by any number of divergent and often conflicting psychoanalytic models; rather, the tropes of horror films and monster-movies consistently provide the materials to sustain seemingly endless variations of psychoanalytic film-criticism concepts – said materials consisting largely of "the symbolic/mythic import of horror film monsters; of the horror affect and how it is generated; [and] the possibly perverse pleasures viewers obtain from being frightened by visible fictions" (Schneider 1). I briefly discuss the engagement with psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship, voyeurism, and identification in Chapter IV in reference to Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* and Ellis's *American Psycho.* My approach is not necessarily a psychoanalytic one by design; rather, my particular interests in the way cinematic monstrosity informs literature are best understood in terms of the dominant strategies of horror film criticism; as these monsters tend to indicate within the texts themselves a kind of fantasy or wish-fulfillment, this approach is doubly appropriate. In so far as my thesis relies on identifying the generic "syntax and semantics" of the monster/horror film, I will necessarily assume a hybrid approach that is also informed by the models of film language established during the "semiotic imperialism" of the 1960s and 1970s (Stam 107).[10]

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[10] Note: these two strains would converge and synthesize with the Marxist critical apparatus into the generally "post-Structural" approach that ensued, synthesizing Freudian and feminist models of the subject, Lacanian ideas of the symbolic order, Marxist models of the culture and ideology, and Saussurian approach to language, creating a kind of leftist "total field" of critical inquiry which drove most academic film criticism until a more "formal" approach to film study (of, for instance, David Bordwell) came to occupy a more dominant position. For a brief history of all of this see Stam 130- 201.

Cohen suggests that every monster is "two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves" (Cohen *Monster Theory* 13). This handily describes my approach to these various literary exhibits: I hope to illustrate how monster-movies and horror film contribute the novels historical context (how they "came to be") and also how cinematic images of monstrosity function within the works to organize material that is otherwise difficult to categorize. I will briefly introduce the various historical functions of the movie monster before turning my attention to the some monstrous antecedents of American literary modernism. The first chapter of this project is titled "Monstrous Modernity and *The Day of the Locust*." An examination of the lingering presence of the creature films of the 1920s and 1930s in Nathanael West's novel (specifically *Frankenstein*, *White Zombie*, and *Freaks*) will realign the position of West's novella in relation to both literary modernism and the modernists' anxious preoccupations with the "indistinct boundaries" of labor, biology and form.

I continue the discussion of this "monstrous modernism" by examining Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as a reaction to popular spectacle, especially in the growing hegemony of the film experience as opposed to pre-cinematic public events like the circus and the freak show. *Nightwood* offers an interesting correlation in this collision of monstrous bodies and popular spectacle as a "reaction" to modernism, and specifically to cinema. Although *Nightwood* does not directly refer to movie monsters, it uses monsters to comment on the rise of cinema – or at least to characterize the modernist reconsideration of outsiders, marginalized people, and the personal upheavals capable when boundaries collapse and categories shift – as that shift necessarily re-constitutes images and observations of monstrosity. As part of the modernist zeitgeist, its inter-war meditations on form, like *Day of the Locust*, find expression in the

centrality of otherly-bodied figures, or various examples of freakery, abjected human matter and experience, atavism, and cultural and physical degeneration. These expressions are matters of boundary and form, and that means they are matters performed and maintained by the monstrous.

These monstrous emblems are put to use in different ways by Thomas Pynchon, whose *Gravity's Rainbow* offers another case study in formal monstrosity (gigantism, combinatorialism, violation of categories and genres, etc). That Pynchon seizes upon the very same monstrous films and figures as West is surely no accident, as those figures not only become iconoclastic and "mythical" actors of a new narrative media (film) but also become a sign of modernism itself. Pynchon uses these signs as contested sites wherein the legacy of modernism upon literature and science can be dramatized and inside which that legacy must struggle with its transformative powers. In this chapter I will identify and examine how the movie-monsters of *Gravity's Rainbow* function—how they elucidate the novel's themes, how they interact with the other patterns of inclusion and exclusion in content, and how they contribute to notions of style and form that make up the work itself. One can then begin to identify how Pynchon uses these rituals of art-horror to grapple with the modernist tradition.

Pynchon's work is, historically speaking, more of a reaction to the Vietnam War and the cold war, though (as Paul Fussel points out) *Gravity's Rainbow* stages the European theater of WWII as an opportunity to deploy literary tropes begun at the advent of the first world war.[11] In my next chapter, I explore how Pynchon deploys a particular cold war monster: *dai kaiju*, or Japanese "giant monsters" like Mothra, Godzilla and Rodan. Pynchon incorporates these movie monsters into his novels to a variety of effects, unleashing their monstrous energies as multivariable figures of allegory, allusion, and associative opportunity. A distinct deviation from

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[11]   See Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*: 69, 110, 124, and especially 334-38.

the American tradition of monster pictures, *kaiju* enact in Pynchon's novels an anxiety or horror

in reaction to state-sponsored (and industrial/commercially oriented) erasure of populist

collectives, counter-culture "freaks," and regional and local difference.

Next, I will examine Bret Easton Ellis's notorious American *Psycho* (and briefly *Less Than*

Zero), which relies on video horror to characterize its narrator (Patrick Bateman, an alleged

murderer who compulsively rents horror videos) and to offer a meditation on issues of formal

monstrosity, narrative enclosure, and "unreadability." Ellis's formal experimentation in

American Psycho relies on both a monstrous combinatorialism (or collage) and on the relentless

horror of Patrick's subjectivity. In *American Psycho*, subjective experience becomes a source

and product of horror just as horrific experience produces the narrative subjects in question. I

will specifically examine *American Psycho* as a work conceived in an atmosphere of Britain's

"video nasty" censorship scandal of the mid 1980s as well as the utopian subversions of new

wave/punk rock music from earlier in that decade (a movement in music conceived as essentially

horrific and aligned with B-movie standards of shock and gore).

Don DeLillo's recent novel *Point Omega* (2010) relies too on iconic images of horror,

specifically Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Douglas Gordon's 2006 video installation *24 Hour Psycho*,

itself a commentary on the iconicity of Hitchcock's film. DeLillo's lean novel uses horror film

and the manipulative point-of-view techniques of Hitchcock to showcase the various

manipulations in narrative at stake in the modern realist novel. This manipulation slowly

becomes a meditation on the horrors of voyeurism inherent in our media culture of total war.

This dissertation has a number of goals. I will demonstrate how these works were produced in

an atmosphere of monstrosity by examining the film trends and cinematic "atmosphere" in which

the works were created. By examining the different functions that these monstrous figures served

in the creation of these narratives, I hope to better inform not only the specific works but the narrative trends of the time, illuminating the role of monstrosity in our conception of modernity and postmodernity. The conflagration of forms and figures at the center of this work will hopefully complicate further discourse concerning the presence/absence of popular forms within elite culture, as well as in biological/ethical debates concerning degeneracy, atavism, hybridity, and gender. As I have already mentioned, I hope to demonstrate the particular relationships between the modernist impulse and horror film, and hope to connect them via their relationship to modern and utopian possibility.

CHAPTER II

A MONSTROUS MODERNISM

The social and technological upheavals at the end of the nineteenth century created, in that tangled network of discourses comprising modernism, a pervasive anxiety towards collective activity and the collective body. While Pinkertons used force and coercion to harass groups of disenfranchised (and often immigrant) labor, the literati too labored against that great beast indigenous to the expanding and machine-like life of the cities: *the masses*, *the mob*, or *the crowd*. Cultural power threatened to aggregate in the lower echelons. "Today," warned Max Nordau in his *Degeneration* (1883), "the claims of the masses are becoming more and more sharply defined, and amount to nothing less than a determination to utterly destroy society as it now exists..." (qtd. in Kolocotroni 37). Nordau was preceded by works like Gustav LeBon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), Hoffmann's "The Cousin's Corner Window" (1822) and Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), which explored the fictional implications of these new urban crowds. The stories of Poe and Hoffmann were examined as expressions of the "shocks" of modern urban collectivity in Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939). Later, Elias Canetti continued the thread in *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht,* 1960). This reaction to the mob was a distinctly urban phenomenon, and was therefore a distinctly "modernist" concern, a shock at the new. "Fear, revulsion, and horror," Benjamin reminds us, "were the emotions which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it" (Illuminations 174).

In one interesting case, fear of the collective sutured issues of nationalism and aesthetics into a surprisingly monstrous creature: on May 15, 1921, members of the American Legion, many

with "permanent and disfiguring evidence of their recent service," staged a march on Miller's

theatre, in Los Angeles, in an attempt to discourage the exhibition of German-made films (Skal

The Monster Show 37). David Skal describes the riot as a collection of disparate elements which

nonetheless achieved a semblance of form in its violent disorder:

> In addition to wounded veterans, the mob at Miller's Theatre included hundreds of
>
> sailors from the Pacific fleet, local members of the Motion Pictures Directors
>
> Association, and throngs of ordinary, outraged citizens. As the day wore on, the crowd's
>
> energy gained momentum; what was first described by the press as a 'spectacular
>
> demonstration' would escalate into 'wild rioting' by nightfall. (38)

These marauders had assembled to protest the US opening night of Robert Weine's *The Cabinet*

of Dr. Caligari.

A similar riot erupted after the release of another "creature" film, *Frankenstein*, in 1932; an

"out of control" crowd at a midnight showing in Omaha destroyed the theatre's plate glass

window, and the publicity fed into the movie's already spectacular image (Skal 139). A revival

of the film in 1937 as a double feature with Todd Browning's *Dracula*, was advertised in cinema

trade papers in language that best embodies the strange correlation between acts of mob violence

and the popularity of creature films, though in a less literal fashion. "THROW AWAY THE

BOOKS!" the advertisement reads; "FORGET EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT

SHOWMANSHIP! BECAUSE HORROR IS PAYING OFF AGAIN!" A picture of the two

monstrous leads, Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, accompanied an arresting prophecy: "... you

play them together! You dare them to see it! AND THEN THE CROWDS BREAK DOWN

YOUR DOORS!" (Skal 204).
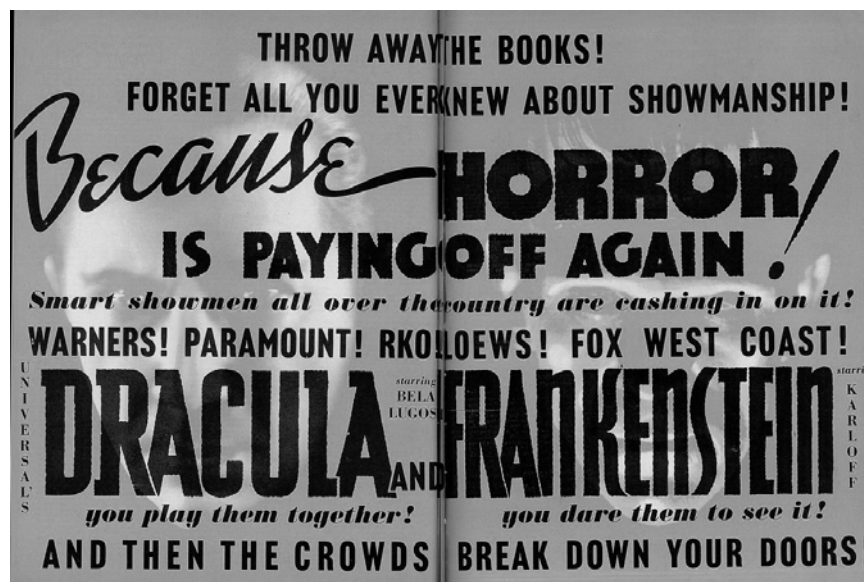
Fig 1: Dracula/Frankenstein double bill, 1937

No wonder these films so often feature rioting crowds in their climactic chase scenes: movie monsters like Frankenstein's creature provide both immediate and symbolic motivation for collective outbursts of both violence and consumption, popular spectacle and cultural criticism. Paul Wells, attempting to define the operative functions of the screen monster in *The Horror Genre*, asserts the need to

> perceive of [the monster] as a metaphor; a projection of certain threats, fears and contradictions that refuse coexistence with the prevailing paradigms and consensual orthodoxies of everyday life. …It comes to represent the disintegration or destabilization of any one dominant perception or understanding of what it means to be human. …it serves to operate as a mode of disruption and breakdown in the status quo… horror texts engage with the collapse of social/socialized formations. (10)

Noel Carroll concurs with this reading of the monster as an agent of social collapse, asserting that "the objects of art-horror are, by definition, impure… the anomalous nature of these beings

is what makes them disturbing, distressing, disgusting…. Monsters… are repelling because they violate standing categories" (Carroll 39). The post-war "disintegration" of social order created a cultural and social ecosystem favorable to the propagation of monsters, collective and otherwise. The May 1921 riot will serve as a reminder, however, that during the 1920s, monsters and crowds threatened *real* social order, not just the symbolic social orders represented on screen in the imaginary world of the film narrative.

The literary scene thrived in this perceived state of degeneration, explosion, and danger, and literary modernism capitalized as well on the fear of the crowd as well as the spectacles in which those crowds participated. James Whale's film *Frankenstein* (1931), for instance, appears connected to a fictional explosion of mob monstrosity in the climactic episode of Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (published in 1939). Homer Simpson, in "uterine flight" from a series of sexual repressions, failures, and humiliations, stomps a young boy, Adore Loomis, to death in front of the teeming, opening-night crowd at Kahn's Persian Palace Theatre (West, *Locust* 171). The crowd then surges forward and wholly consumes Homer. Monstrosity, specifically in the form of movie monsters who violate standing categories of order, radiates throughout the pages of *Locust*. Most overtly, Maybelle Loomis (the "monstrous mother" of the "repulsive child actor" Adore) compares her son to the Frankenstein monster (Milburn 68). Stephanie Sarver has extrapolated this comparison into a litany of correlating characterizations and setting effects, concluding that

> West invokes images suggestive of James Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein* to comment
> on the indistinct boundaries between cinematic illusion and Hollywood life... In
> commenting on the Hollywood community and employing a motif in his novel, West
> offers more than simple criticism of the superficial aspects of Hollywood culture: he

reveals the social disorder that occurs when a body of people adopts the artifice of film

and integrates it into their lives as a representation of reality. (Sarver 217)

Sarver's perceptive argument represents a common and perhaps orthodox interpretation of *The Day of the Locust*: its critique of Hollywood artificiality and spectacle inherently refutes cinematic narrative (and indeed the symptomatic social performances manifest in its wake) as mechanical, deceitful, and alienating.[12] Both the social and economic forms of alienation are here implied, as the division of labor required to make a film and the "bullpen" conditions faced by studio writers in the 1930s inherently reduced the process to one of wage labor. But a closer examination of the lingering presence of the creature films of the 1920s and 1930s in *Locust*, specifically in relation to the films *Frankenstein*, *White Zombie* (1932), and *Freaks* (1932), betrays thematic and ideological affinities which dispel any simple critique of cinema's influence on mass culture during this "high" stage of modernism. A monstrously historicized reading of *Locust* realigns the position of West's novella in relation to both literary modernism and the modernists' anxious preoccupations with the "indistinct boundaries" of labor, biology and form. David Skal opens his "cultural history" of the horror film, *Monster Show,* with the infamous epigraph on monstrosity from *Locust*: "It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that are. But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous." These lines demonstrate the thematic matrix of *Locust* by contextualizing the specter of monstrosity in an examination of form.

West's investigations into the monstrous excesses and grotesqueries that accompanied the modernist *zeitgeist* are not without its "High Modern" precedents or at least contemporaries:

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[12]   West's name is habitually associated with the concept of the Hollywood novel, an association based not only on *Locust*, but also from his work as a script writer in Hollywood.

Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* is one potent example. It's officially Eliot-sanctioned (he wrote two introductions for it, and apparently lobbied for its publication at Faber & Faber), and could not avoid the language of horror when praising the book: "what I would leave the reader prepared to find is the great achievement of a style, the beauty of phrasing, the brilliance of wit and characterization, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (Eliot xxii). Barnes's authorial identity is more visibly "expatriotic" in the tradition of Stein, Pound, et cetera than West's (which may help categorize *Nightwood* more rigidly in that segment of authors we describe as "High Modern").[13] *Nightwood* offers an interesting correlation in this collision of monstrous bodies and popular spectacle as a "reaction" to modernism and specifically to cinema.

While West assembles a cast of Hollywood and vaudeville grotesques in *Locust*, Barnes concentrates on circus people, circus images, and the spectacular bodies of the fairground or carnival. In her journalism, Barnes had previously written about various pre-film entertainments and the pressures that entertainments like the circus, vaudeville, and other music hall performances faced after the advent of film. Stephanie Winkiel has examined Barnes's interest in what she calls "Public Culture" and the performers and producers who created that culture. Her essays and interviews "document the fulcrum of the shift from live, interactive forms of

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[13] ASIDE: the Wikipedia entry for *High Modernism* features a list of "canonical" authors of that description; Barnes is the first entry. We may be able to thank good-old ABC order for this, but I find it telling. Engaging in any discussion of the problematic nature of the terms "canonical" or "writer" (or the whole of Wikipedia – indeed the dubious knowledge base of the whole internet, really) are clearly outside of the scope of this essay. "High Modernism." *Wikipedia*, retrieved 5 December 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_modernism#In_literature>.

entertainment to mass culture spectacles" (Winkiel 9). For instance, Barnes describes the "evil"

influence of film on stage culture via her biographical sketch/interview of Alla Nazimova, a

Russian stage actress whose career suffered after she transitioned to film acting: "the devil

leaned out and gently pulled her into Hollywood and catastrophe" (qtd in Winkiel 27). Her

pieces eulogized these public culture events, lamenting the loss of the participatory, specialized,

and localized entertainments of live entertainment in the wake of the antiseptic, quiet,

authoritarian and middle class values of the cinema (Winkiel 20). In *Nightwood*, the marginal

figures of the circus and the sideshow become examples of an alternative to such a cinema

culture, and Barnes casts these performers as whole subjects despite their amputations and

augmentations – a state to be contrasted with the instability of identity that Robin's "normal"

suitors face. The only bodies which Barnes depicts as "whole" are "the constructed bodies of the

circus performers" (Armstrong 128). But we shall see that this contrast is very complex,

especially since the suitors are not coded as "normal" or healthy from the start, and that the

monstrous body becomes the standard (instead of an exception) in which Robin Vote can

function as a "utopian" ideal of a generative-abject form.

Although *Nightwood* may not directly mention movies or movie monsters, it appears to use

monsters to engage both the rise of cinema and the modernist reconsideration of outsiders,

marginalized people, and the personal upheavals capable when boundaries collapse and

categories shift – as that shift necessarily re-constitutes images and observations of monstrosity.

So monstrosity in *Nightwood* is a kind of historicizing device. As part of the modernist zeitgeist,

its inter-war meditations on form find expression in the centrality of otherly-bodied figures, or

various expressions of freakery, abjected human matter and experience, atavism, and cultural and

physical degeneration.[14] In this way *Nightwood* and *Day of the Locust* are of a piece. Note

Jeanette Winterson's language comparing *Nightwood* to its literary predecessors: "This is not the

solid nineteenth-century world of narrative, it is the *shifting, slipping*, relative world of Einstein

and the Modernists, the twin assaults by science and art on what we thought we were sure of"

(Winterson x, emphasis added). The words *shifting* and *slippery* suggest matters of boundary and

form, and that means they are matters wherein one will find monsters. Jane Marcus describes

Nightwood as a "prose-poem of abjection," and notes that "*Nightwood* is riven with mixed

metaphors, jarring images and sudden shifts in register" (qtd in Loncrain 299, 301). So all of this

shifting, slipping, mixing and jarring is itself echoes of the monster-functions of *Nightwood* – or

rather, the Barnes's stylistic effects produce the same results as the monstrous subjects of her

inquiry. Setting *Nightwood* against *The Day of the Locust* will identify how cinema and

monstrosity came to synechdochize a certain aspect of the problems of Modernism and the

modern novel – problems to be addressed by later authors like Pynchon, DeLillo, and Ellis.

FILMY BORDERS: *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST*

By 1936, cinematic monstrosity had proven to be a deep reservoir in the cultural imagination.

The "monster" picture had reached tremendous heights in the thirties, and this so-called golden

age of Hollywood was largely populated with creatures who, alongside of the gangsters and the

cowboys, made up a significant part of the growing constellation of Hollywood stars. Universal

earned large financial returns from Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and followed closely with

James Whale's *Frankenstein*. Immensely popular, *Frankenstein* opened on 4 November 1931 at

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[14]   On "freakery," see Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self.*

the Mayfair Theatre in New York's Time Square; it provoked even more public attention when it played as a double bill with *Dracula*, in 1938. Indeed, the pictures earned more at the box office in 1938 then they did in their original release (Dardis 175) *Variety* reported that the double bill was "mopping up" everywhere (in Skal: 1995, 204). As we will see, this "revival" is more important to the publication history of *Locust*. These releases were followed by Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1932) and Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932). RKO produced *King Kong* (1933), an enormously successful and influential blockbuster. Of course, these films were preceded by classics of German expressionism like Weine's aforementioned *Caligari*, Paul Wegener's *The Golem* (1920), and Fritz Lang's *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Metropolis* (1926). West would have been aware of the great creature films of the thirties simply from their ballyhoo, but his professional work tied him quite directly to the studios which produced these screen horrors. From July to December of 1933 and '35, West was a writer for Columbia Pictures (Martin 203-89). From 1936 to 1938, West wrote for Republic Productions. He began his work on *The Day of the Locust* in 1935 and 1936 and it was published by Random House in May 1938, after which he began work for Universal—home of the most famous movie monsters—before his death in 1939 (Martin 203-89).

   Locust is a strange and sometimes vicious short novel in which Tod Hackett, an Ivy League graduate who moves to Hollywood as a set designer and painter, aspires to artistic greatness but becomes obsessed with the young femme-fatale Faye Greener. In her pursuit, Tod meets rival suitor Homer Simpson, who has moved from the Midwest to relax his nerves; Earl Shoope, an angular and lifeless cowboy actor and his Mexican compatriot Miguel (about whom more later) who fight roosters; Faye's father Harry Greener, a dying former Vaudevillian, and Abe Kusich, a tough-talking dwarf. Tod's friend Claude Estees is another screenwriter, and appears to be based

on the real-life William Faulkner (with whom West went hunting on occasion – Dardis 177). A

menagerie of grotesques parades through the novel.

Direct references to Whale's *Frankenstein* are the most obvious link to *Locust* and the

creature cycle of that period. [15] When Homer Simpson and Tod Hackett meet the young Adore

Loomis, he greets them with a perverse rendition of "Momma doan' want no peas." Maybelle

Loomis suggests that her son's behavior is really a pantomime of "the Frankenstein monster"

(West 140). By the time of the composition of *Locust*, the image of Boris Karloff in full make-

up, lurching towards the audience had been assimilated into the language of film itself. Consider

the description of Adore, the figure for whom the invocation of Frankenstein's monster is first

made and who Irving Malin refers to as "the most grotesque character in the novel" (Malin 93).

Not only is he dressed "like a man," in a full suit, but he also has eyebrows which have been

"plucked and shaped carefully"; he has a "pale, peaked face and a large, troubled forehead" with

"great staring eyes" (139). Compare this troubled forehead to Boris Karloff's makeup effects in

Frankenstein, which were groundbreaking and influential at the time of release. And of course it

is Homer's brutal murder of Adore which brings the novel's riot to full froth; the vengeful mob

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[15]   Another strange and probably superficial coincidence exists linking West's novels with the monster

pictures: the name of eviscerated "hero" of *A Cool Million*, Lemuel Pitkins, suggests and echoes the name

Laemmle—as in Carl Laemmle, the founder of Universal Studios, and Carl Laemmle, Jr., a producer and

future president of Universal. Carl Laemmle's life before Universal could function as a template for the

Horatio Alger novels which *A Cool Million* parodies; Laemmle Jr. is credited as producer for *The

Mummy* (1932), *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Frankenstein*, *Werewolf of London* (1935), and *Bride of

Frankenstein* (1935), among others.

echoes the pitchfork and torch-bearing crowd at the end of Whale's monster-movie

Frankenstein.

As Stephanie Sarver notes, great similarities appear between in the physical traits and

behaviors of Homer and the Monster, including their stumbling gaits and their seemingly

autonomous hands. Homer becomes the focus of consciousness in the middle section of the

novel, as well as being the both the catalyst for and victim of the riot, and the characterizations of

him should therefore be considered crucial to understanding the novel. West first invokes

Karloff's performance of the monster while describing Homer's retreat from Hollywood after

being rejected and humiliated by Faye: "Homer walked more than ever like a badly made

automaton and his features were set in a rigid, mechanical grin…With each step, he lurched to

one side and then the other" (West 178). Sarver finds the similarity even more apparent in

West's description of Homer's waking struggles on the first morning in his new home: ". . . he

began to work laboriously toward consciousness. The struggle was a hard one. His head trembled

and his feet shot out. Finally his eyes opened, then widened" (82).[16] Noting this sequence, she

asserts

> [Homer is] a consolidation of inharmonious parts, much like the Frankenstein monster,
>
> who is created from disparate parts of different men…West's insistent attention to
>
> Homer's hands effectively compels the most obtuse reader to recognize their
>
> significance: through them we come to understand that we must rely on the nonverbal
>
> messages conveyed through Homer's hands to understand the impact of the situations he

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[16]   Robin Vote in *Nightwood* performs a similar awakening: "A series of almost invisible shudders

wrinkled her skin as the water dripped from her lashes, over her mouth and on to the bed. A spasm of

waking moved upward from some deep-shocked realm, and she opened her eyes" (Barnes 39).

encounters. As with Whale's film monster, Homer reveals through his hands that which

he cannot articulate. (Sarver 218)

This image of disembodied hands additionally links *Locust's* relationship to the cult film

favorite *White Zombie*. Victor Halperin's foray into the monster "cycle" of the thirties, *White*

Zombie saw widespread release and was publicized as "shocking and weird." The film concerns

horrific events surrounding the wedding of Neil Parker and Madeleine Shor on the "mysterious"

island of Haiti. Beaumont, the couple's host, has enlisted local witch-doctor Murder Legendre

(Bela Lugosi) to zombify Madeleine so she can become Beaumont's slave. Legendre meanwhile

has amassed a mob of former enemies into a pack of slow but resilient zombies whom he

controls by performing a series of clenching gestures with his hands; he eventually turns on

Beaumont, attempting to secure control of Madeleine for himself. The movie is, by today's

standards, not so much horrific as horrifically awful. In 1932, however, the film was the subject

of a massive publicity blitz in an attempt to capitalize on the success of films like *Frankenstein*

and *Dracula*.

The influence of *White Zombie* and the figure of the mechanical, walking dead surfaces in

Tod Hackett's encounters with the los angelenos of the novel, the vicious but anonymous mass

whose "clothing was somber and badly cut… while the others moved rapidly, darting into stores

and cocktail bars, they loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and

stared at everyone who passed. When their stare was returned, their eyes filled with hatred…"

(West, *Locust* 60). The disheveled clothing of the populace recalls conventional zombie

costuming, and their slow (or stationary) stature resembles not only the "sleepwalking"

movements of the undead in *White Zombie* but also the generically slow zombies of later films

like *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

The zombies of *White Zombie*, it should be noted, are not actually re-animated corpses but humans under a form of hypnotic control resulting from the death-like state Legendre's zombie-powder induces in them. These automatons may seem different from the contemporary (and now conventional) representation of a zombie as a decomposing human corpse, but both versions articulate similar fears: the growing anxiety that within modernity and monopoly capitalism that the human laborer was as replaceable as parts of a machine. Couple this fear to an anxiety over the loss of bodily control associated with the high speed innovations in movement made by the automobile and other machinery (and figuratively in the increasingly visible alienation of workers from their labor, i.e. the assembly line and migrant labor camps). Legendre appears to play the role of the evil industrialist, celebrating to Beaumont the fact that his zombie plantation workers "work faithfully... they're not concerned about long hours." The modernist ambivalence towards technology often took the shape in the critique of the dehumanization of mechanized industry, prophetically so in Karl Capec's play *R.U.R.* (first performed in 1921) as well as Chaplain's *Modern Times* (1936) and the aforementioned *Metropolis*. The mindlessness and lack of human presence and/or depth in the figure of the voodoo zombie represents (among other things) just such mechanical dehumanization and automatism since the voodoo zombie was usually created to perform labor or menial tasks. See for instance the description of the zombification process from W. B. Seabrooke's 1929 chronicle *The Magic Island*, generally attributed for bringing the zombie to the US:

 The *zombie*, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave

 and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life – it is a dead body which is

 made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to do this

 go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has time to rot, galvanize it into movement,

and then make it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more

often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks…"

(Seabrook 94)

The zombie is born of modernism and the simultaneous chronologies of Primitivism in the arts,

colonialism and expansionism in politics and commerce, and the Rise of the Machine (as it were)

as both a symbol of speed and power and a herald of doom for the craftsman, laborer, and

tradesman. The voodoo zombie is an automaton, and therefore an early symbol of the machine-

man.

   The word *automaton* is most closely associated in West's novel with Harry Greener and

Homer Simpson. West uses the word several times throughout the novel to describe both

Simpson and Greener (as well as the mock-soldiers of the *Waterloo* sequence). For instance,

Homer must awaken "in sections, like a poorly made automaton" (West, *Locust* 82). Harry is

played almost entirely as a mechanical man, an actual machine of wheels and cogs – a state

expressed most visibly in the slapstick description of his heart-attack at Homer's house:

"Suddenly, like a mechanical toy that had been over wound, something snapped inside of him

…" (92).
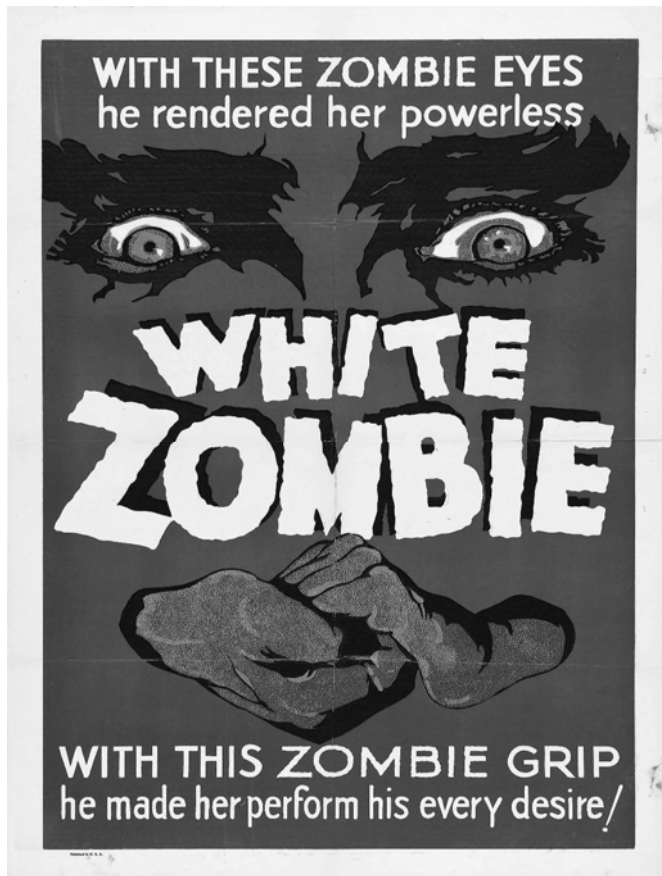
Fig 2: White Zombie lobby poster

White Zombie images of the alienated, mechanical body further resonate in *Locust* in the image of grasping, clenching, or otherwise autonomous hands and hand movements (a pathological habit of Homer Simpson in *Locust* often attributed to the influence of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*). Murder Legendre's hands—which he contorts into a vice-like grip to somehow control the movements of his zombies—receive prominent screen-time in *White Zombie*. One lobby poster for the film features the words "White Zombie" in between a close up of Lugosi's hypnotic eyes and a depiction of his inter-locking hands along with the caption "WITH HIS ZOMBIE GRIP he made her perform his every desire!" (Rhodes 125; see Fig. 1.2).

It is these clenching hands that signal the first parallel image between *White Zombie* and *Locust*. The descriptive association of Homer and his hands continues when he wakes from a nap:

> Every part was awake but his hands. They still slept… He got out of the bed … and carted his hands into the bathroom. He turned on the cold water. When the basin was full, he plunged his hands in up to the wrist. They lay quietly on the bottom like a pair of strange aquatic animals. When they were thoroughly chilled and began to crawl about he lifted them out and hid them in a towel. (West, *Locust* 82)

Homer, unable to stop his compulsively moving hands, annoys Tod at a cockfight staged for Claude Estees's benefit. Tod observes that "What made it particularly horrible was its precision. It wasn't pantomime, it was manual ballet." (161). The essential difference between these two characterizations is one of control. Legendre enacts his "manual ballet" as a demonstration of mastery over others, while Homer's inability to control his hands—to keep them ordered—results in a compulsive display of monstrosity, a body bereft of control and behaving as if animated but effectively dead.[17]

Perhaps the most shocking of the monster pictures of the thirties which West incorporates into *Locust* is Tod Browning's infamous tale of love and revenge, *Freaks*. The film opens with a carnival barker offering to tell the story of the sideshow's most horrible monstrosity, one who "used to be beautiful, folks." The story then flashes back to an unidentified circus and the lives of its otherly-bodied sideshow performers, including the midget Hans and his (also miniature)

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[17]   Compare this compulsion to the probing hands of Robin in *Nightwood*: "When she touched a thing, her hands seemed to take the place of the eye… her fingers would go forward, hesitate, tremble, as if they had found a face in the dark. When her hand finally came to rest, the palm closed; it was as if she had stopped a crying mouth. Her hand lay still and she would turn away" (Barnes 46).

love Frieda, as well as a consortium of half-men, bird-women, conjoined twins and dwarves—all portrayed by actual circus or sideshow "oddities." When the "freaks" discover a murderous plot hatched by the "big people," they enact a brutal revenge on the beautiful Cleopatra and her conspiring strong man: Hercules is stabbed to death (in the original version he is castrated, though that sequence did not survive the censors) while Cleopatra is mutilated and transformed into the barker's aforementioned horror: a kind of "human duck", tarred and feathered and with hands melted into flippers (Skal *Horror Show* 50).

The film has entertained a notorious place in the realm of cult, horror, or exploitation films because of its complex and often confusing depiction of the differently-formed "freaks." While unusually transparent and "anti-Hollywood" in its use of real sideshow performers, the film nevertheless could be seen to be exploiting the individuals in question in the very same way that they are exploited in the carnivals and circuses they inhabit. The United Kingdom banned the film; one reviewer in *The New York Times* quipped that "the difficulty is in telling whether [*Freaks*] should be shown in the Rialto… or in, say, the Medical Center… [*Freaks*] is so loathsome I am nauseated thinking about it… it is not fit to be shown anywhere" (qtd in Fielder 296). One theater poster for the film reads "Unlike anything you've ever seen… the *strange* and *startling* love-drama of a *midget*, a lovely *siren*, and a *giant!*" (qtd. in Hawkins 265). Though the love triangle of *Locust* does not actively involve the dwarf of the novel (Abe Kusich, though it is difficult to see any semblance of the "homunculus" Abe in the gentile and well-spoken Hans), it does involve a siren (Faye) and a giant in the form of either the "monumental sculpture" of Homer or his comically tall rival, Earl Shoope. The trapeze artist Cleopatra also displays some similarities to West's succubus Faye, who, besides being an object of sexual desire and scopographic pleasure, also enters into an exploitative "marriage" with Homer. Faye's teasing

emasculation of Homer at the Cinderella Bar closely resembles Cleopatra's treatment of Hans:
the circus beauty has mounted what Joan Hawkins calls a "campaign of sexual humiliation"
against Hans once they are married, victimizing him through "complete feminization and
infantilization" (Hawkins 271). Faye's repeated jabs at Homer for being a "big baby" offer little
variation.

West had "a particular feel for the 'broken bastards' who inhabit the fringes of society," notes
Victor Comerchero, "and in his novels these figures crawl out of the shadows into a bright light"
(4). Comerchero may not have seen the climactic revenge sequence of *Freaks*, when the
"broken" bodies of the sideshow performers literally crawl through mud and out from under
circus wagons to wreak their revenge, but the allegorical image of these "broken bastards"
resonates with tense immediacy in the post-war atmosphere of the 1930s—such a figure
indisputably wielded (in Breton's words) the power of "stirring the human sensibility for a time"
(qtd. in Jameson 104). Great masses of broken bodies, be they the scarred and amputated bodies
of the war veterans or the degenerating and malnourished migrant workers from the dust bowl,
filled the streets in the 1930s. The social movements that developed around these masses figured
largely in the lives of the leftists, avowed communists, and intelligentsia of the west coast. West
himself cared deeply about social progress, though his work represses it entirely. Writing to
Malcolm Cowley in 1939, he confessed that

> …I'm a comic writer and it seems impossible to me to handle any of the "big things"
> without seeming to laugh or at least smile. …What I mean is that out here we have a
> strong progressive movement and I devote a great deal of time to it. Yet, although this
> new novel is about Hollywood, I found it impossible to include any of those activities in
> it. I made a desperate attempt before giving up. …When not writing a novel—say at a

meeting of a committee we have out here to help the migrant worker—I do believe it and

try to act on that belief. But at the typewriter by myself I can't. (West *Novels and Other*

Writings 794)

West's aborted attempts to include in his novels serious social critique or his Marxist sympathies

may have, through the implied presence of monstrous horror films, found fictional hosts to

deliver them from the shadows.

The evocative constellation of classic monster films, actors, directors and images traversing

the pages of *Locust* demonstrates literary modernism's preoccupation with biological or

embodied horror. *Locust* irritates the biological sensitivities of modernism (eugenics,

degeneration, etc) that Angelique Richardson refers to as "the new biology" (Richardson 6-33).

The creature cycle of the 1930s had a scientific and ideological foundation in the widespread

acceptance of eugenics and the "progressive" policies eugenicists proposed for putting

Darwinian evolution into practical application. While eugenics grew in popularity in England

after the Boer war, America soon came to embrace its ideals. By 1924, the International

Commission of Eugenics listed fifteen member nations, including the United States and Great

Britain; the US National Origins Act of 1924 limited immigration based on eugenic principles of

Nordic superiority; perhaps most shocking to the contemporary reader is the enactment, by 1934,

of sterilization laws in thirty American states (Bradshaw 35). So, West's conception of "the

monstrous" synthesizes anxieties over degeneration and hybridity which seemed to be part of the

ambient culture of the early thirties, embodied in "thriller" films like *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*

as well as in the vitriolic and (retrospectively) cruel eugenic observations of renowned authors

like Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and (as we shall see) Djuna Barnes.

The spirit of eugenics also haunts *Locust*, as its focus on physical degeneration and grotesquerie (most notably in the form of Abe) determines many of the characters, "extras," and social landscapes of the text. Consider Tod's famous assertion that "few things are sadder than the truly monstrous" (West 61). Transplant from the East, ivy leaguer, classicist and set illustrator for a major Hollywood studio, Tod expresses this sadness over the pathos of monstrosity while surveying the lathe and plaster anomalies of his Hollywood Hills neighborhood. His critique of this a-historical bricolage of architectural surfaces parallels the observations of eugenics proponent E. W. MacBride, a spokesman for Lamarckian eugenics in the early twentieth century (quoted infamously by Eliot): "In all cases where large numbers of a given species of animals are raised under somewhat artificial conditions a certain number of monsters will be produced… This is true both of insects raised on banana peel and of human beings raised in a large city" (qtd. in Bradshaw "Eugenics" 44). Los Angeles, a city whose immense wealth stemmed from artifice and illusion, has produced its own degenerate populations of facades and replicas. But Tod's comments are not limited to architecture: his lament concerns the degenerating citizens of Los Angeles, the degenerate and dispossessed who have gone there "to die." Whale's *Frankenstein* also dabbles briefly with eugenic discourse during Dr. Waldman's lecture on the "normal brain" and the "criminal" or degenerate brain; Igor's commandeering of the degenerate brain ostensibly provides the biological "cause" of the creature's violent eruptions.

Atavism represents a further and perhaps more specific form of degeneration deployed in the modernist biological critique of crowds – and of the aesthetic forms that accompanied these social changes. Nordau links these forms to degenerative social behavior: "the spasmodic seeking of new forms," he writes of literary modernism, "is nothing more than historical vanity,

the freaks of strolling players and charlatanism… Its sole result has hitherto been childish

declamation, with colored lights and changing perfumes as accompaniments, and atavistic games

of shadows and pantomimes" (Kolocotroni 26-7). *Locust* consistently positions characters in just

such an atmosphere, which Comerchero calls "a world of half-men" (141). Tod often perceives

his fellow *angelenos* in terms bestial and atavistic. Abe, for instance, is characterized as

subhuman during the fight with Miguel; as Wisker points out, he is only referred to as "Abe" at

the end of the fight, and is otherwise called "the dwarf" or "the homunculus"—except when

Miguel dashes him against the wall like "a man killing a rabbit" (117).

But it is Miguel who best represents, in the imaginative frame of the text, the subhuman

primitive ("a surrogate for the beast," according to John Keyes) (Keyes 165). Tod first sees "the

Mexican" on a picnic with Faye at Earl and Miguel's campsite. West describes Miguel as

> toffee colored, with large Armenian eyes and pouting black lips. His head was a mass of
>
> tight, ordered curls. He wore a long haired sweater, called a "gorilla" in and around Los
>
> Angeles, with nothing under it. His soiled duck trousers were held up by a red bandanna
>
> handkerchief. On his feet were a pair of tattered tennis sneakers. (113)

Locust positions Miguel in monstrous, atavistic terms: a disordered arrangement of textures and

surfaces, his appearance fuses animal imagery (duck pants, a gorilla sweater) and ambiguously

mixed ethnicity (Armenian eyes, black lips). Most of the scholarly attention to West's treatment

of Hollywood focuses on his critique of the film culture as an illusion, as a masquerade, and a

waste dump of civilization. Few treat it for what it is: a border town. Miguel threatens Tod not

only as a rival for Faye Greener but also because of his non-whiteness; in the anxious tension of

a border town, "the Mexican" easily functions as a monstrous Other. The invocation of screen

monsters in *Locust* dramatizes, among other things, the desire to control or assimilate the

massive influx of immigrants, cultures and humanity into the Los Angeles of the thirties. Movie monsters, argues Robin Wood, represent the "repressed other" of modern middle-class American culture: "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with… in one of two ways: either by rejecting it and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (27). Both *White Zombie* and *Dracula* feature the travels of Americans into mysterious foreign lands; Freund's *The Mummy* also concerns Americans who travel to the deserts of Egypt and encounter the exotic city of Cairo. The necessity of foreign travel to experience the monstrous stems, in Rhodes's words, from the "hatred brewed against immigrants" in the 1920s, and the common opinion in the US that Europeans were to blame for World War I and European immigrants were to blame for the great depression (19). Norden and Cahill concur that *Freaks* "shares some general similarities with other horror films of the period - most notably, its revenge theme, the plurality of 'Others' coded as aberrant if not outright abhorrent, and exotic/foreign settings…" (Norden and Cahill 88). Thus, the combination of aberrant others and exotic settings finds a perfect niche in the Los Angeles of *Locust*.

  "Literary" authors, working in Hollywood, may have viewed their works as monstrous, degenerated (though their biographers most certainly shared this view). *Locust* uses the thematic and allegorical currency of the monster as entry into the great anxiety over literary and artistic *form* that pathologically defines the modernist movement. West had been experimenting or perhaps struggling with form, and his most successful result (according to the critical consensus) appears to be his novel *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), which he tellingly described as a novel in the form of a comic strip: "The chapters to be squares in which many things happen through one action. The speeches contained in the conventional balloons. I abandoned the idea, but retained

some of the comic strip technique: Each chapter instead of going forward in time, also goes backward, forward, up, and down in space like a picture" (West, *Novels and Other Writings* 401). His correspondence with William Carlos Williams regarding their co-edited magazine *Contact* demonstrates a keen attention to form and the political content and compromises such forms suggest.[18] In a letter to Edmund Wilson in 1939, West discussed this struggle with literary form: "I have been feeling even more discouraged than usual," he confesses. "The ancient bugaboo of my kind—'why write novels?'—is always before me. I have no particular message for a troubled world (except possibly "beware")…" (794). While the word *bugaboo* offers a particularly tempting flirtation between matters formal and monstrous, the letter nevertheless illuminates West's concerns with the limitations of the medium.

Perhaps then the novel could be revitalized through formal mediation, bricolage, or collage—as Joyce had no doubt learned in his experience with *Ulysses*. Jonathon Veitch rightly observes West's preoccupation with such mediation, writing "…West took representation as his subject. This enabled him to reject the usual stances of opposition that were operative during the thirties in favor of a resistance that is more highly mediated—that focuses on mediation itself" (Veitch xvii). The style of *Locust* consists, according to Deborah Wyrick, of "a combination of Eisenstinian film technique, ritual drama, and verbal 'quotations' from old master paintings" (Wyrick 157). From the many "mass media" available as a resource from which West could draw, it is the genre or "B" picture which so perfectly suited his "particular kind of joking" and so aptly provided West the material to "investigate the codes, conventions and subject

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[18] …declining, for instance, one piece as "not as good as [the story by] Paseo (which contrasts somewhat America and Europe) and might pull our punch—American brutality through lack of moral frame" (West, *Novels and Other Writings* 774).

positions…within the constrictions of mass culture's totalizing designs" (Veitch 73). West's

work at Republic pictures well trained him in the art of the B picture, as did his work at

Universal. In the spring of 1939, F. Scott Fitzgerald received a set of galleys of *Locust* from

West with a note from the author, who explained that "It took a long time to write while working

on westerns and cops and robbers" (Dardis 177). *Locust* was conceived amidst the schlock with

which creature films are often associated. In addition to this genetic relationship with genre

films, West's novel "meticulously and systematically" incorporates elements of Frank Capra's

films, notably *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), as well as other popular films of the time,

including *A Star is Born* (1937) and *San Francisco* (1936), creating what Richard Keller Simon

calls "an elaborate nest of movies" woven from "almost everything moviegoers of the late 1930s

would have found comforting and familiar" (513-14).

 Thus, the book takes the form of a "monstrous collage," in the words of Alvin Kernan (58).

What better allegorical figure of such collage exists than Frankenstein's monster? This notion of

the monstrous collage consistently appears in criticism of the novel, for which Norman

Podhoretz's review of *The Complete Works of Nathanael West* can act as representative:

"*Locust*…is a difficult book to get one's bearings in. It lumbers along at a queerly uneven pace,

and one is never sure what West is up to. …once we see that the slight touch of unreality in the

narrative is West's method of trying to convey the feel of Hollywood, this apparently weird,

disjointed book begins to assume a meaningful shape" (Podhoretz 84). Podhoretz's review

tellingly adopts, when it comes to matters of form, a conceit of a lumbering creature, an unreal

and "weird" disruption of narrative expectation and order. Consider also Julian Symons's

description of the climactic riot: "A mass of people who have come out to watch the celebrities

arriving at a first night are transformed suddenly into a single monster" (103). Like Homer, and

the creature that inspired him, *Locust* is a "consolidation of inharmonious parts" (Sarver 218). The body of *The Day of the Locust,* sutured together from monster pictures and depictions of the monstrous, subsumes the social and popular forms of the monster into the content and structure of the "modern novel." This structural hybrid formalizes the body of the monster and imbues it with a vitality of degeneration. The "sum total of all horror," writes Geoffery O'Brien, "… all started with a point of contact, the crossing of a line... The filmy border between two worlds—analogous in every way to the border that was the movie screen—blurred and permitted passage" (O'Brien 187). In this scenario, *Locust* transgresses the border between the literary and popular, tempted by a narrative synthesis that the "literary boys" who neglected and attacked West's fiction indeed found monstrous. His problem was one of proximity, of standing too far into the "filmy border" between literary and commercial writing, novels and film and of being thus too closely assimilated with popular spectacle and its associated bestialisms. "What are you doing in that ghastly place?" demanded Edmund Wilson of West in a letter dated 1939; "You're an artist and really have no business there" (Dardis 174). Hollywood's monstrous productions threatened the virtue of literature by its *proximity* to mass humanity, a proximity visible in its popularity, its tenacity, and its financial success. The plight of the "literary" aspirant in the Hollywood of the thirties may represent to the literary establishment that object of Tod's "truly monstrous" lament.

As West struggled with form and the peculiar challenge of incorporating political critique into his fiction, his own work was being transformed by the laborious process of scriptwriting (as described in a letter to Josephine Herbst regarding his script work at Columbia):

> …this stuff about easy work is all wrong. My hours are from ten in the morning until six at night with a full day on Saturday. They gave me a job to do five minutes after I sat down in my office… and I'm expected to turn out pages and pages a day. There's no

fooling here. All the writers sit in cells in a row and the minute a typewriter stops

someone pokes his head in the door to see if you're thinking. (Dardis 157)

The monster is also a site of transformation: of the dead into the living, of a man into an animal,

of a body-thing into a machine-thing. At the synthesis of script writing and novel writing—a

novel about Hollywood—*Locust* invoked the monster as a totem and familiar, an object of the

unconscious with which his new form could identify.

I use the horror or creature film here in just such an instance of generic and critical collage:

by establishing the filmic "genes" of *The Day of the Locust*, and by thus incorporating the critical

discourse of film history and critique into an analysis of the modern novel, I hope not only to

illuminate the origins of this specific text but to demonstrate the formal and analytical hybridity

required in the study of contemporary narrative. Since the novel uses Hollywood monsters as a

kind of narrative armature, one can logically turn to the critical discourse of the monster film in

an attempt to study or understand the mechanizations and signifying practices of that armature.

The Day of the Locust embodies a discursive transformation and synthesis between two

competing forms of narrative in the 1930s (literary and cinematic) and between different

elements of monstrosity defining the historical conditions surrounding that conflict—monsters

both "true" and artificial, monsters of biology and monsters of the cinema. In so transforming,

the text produces a satire of the "ambient" cultural concerns of its era while erupting into

atavistic depictions of violence to stage the convergence of said forms—and ultimately reveals

through these internal conflicts a genesis in an atmosphere of monstrous anxiety. Rather than

simply critiquing the rising mass entertainments in the years between the wars, West's

supposedly "degenerate" novel more accurately represents a desire for vitality and a concomitant

fear of and desire for hybridity. The repressed presence of disenfranchised and alienated labor—

and the automated forces of globalization and industrialization which profited by this alienation—returns to the surface of the text in the eruptive and disruptive form of the monster.

In *Nightwood*, we will see a different process: one in which the movie-monster does not erupt into the novel's imaginary space but instead becomes part of a process of interrogating the lived, human conditions of monstrosity as signs of physical and spiritual decay – and also utopian possibility.

BRIMMING WITH ABOMINATIONS: MODERNIST MONSTROSITY IN *NIGHTWOOD*

Set in Europe and the US, *Nightwood* tells the story of Robin Vote and her various romantic and social entanglements: she marries Felix Volkbein, a "false" Baron who is seeks an heir, but when they give birth to a sickly child Robin leaves him and becomes involved with the clinging Nora Flood – who she eventually leaves for the professional widow Jenny Petherbridge. The characters all encounter the transvestite unlicensed doctor Matthew O'Connor, whose babblings take up most of the novel's text.

Nightwood was released in 1936; the American release came in 1937 (though Barnes had a finished draft as early as 1932). *Nightwood* is therefore roughly contemporaneous with *Locust*, and could be subject to the same "cultural ecology" of monster movies and monstrous "stars" and spectacles like those that have infiltrated West's novel: *Freaks, Dracula, Frankenstein,* and *White Zombie*. Barnes "interrogated aspects of mass culture" between 1913 and 1931 in her early journalism, and had interviewed directors, actors, and other performers from stage and from cinema, including D.W. Griffith (Winkiel 9).Publication of *Nightwood* took several years. The sort of monstrous films Barnes would have "interrogated" by the time of *Nightwood*'s

composition would be more limited to the German Expressionist icons of proto-horror film:

Caligari, *The Golem*, *Nosferatu*, etc. But *Nightwood* has an imaginative affinity with the

monster-pictures of the 1930s that compliments that of their silent European predecessors. Nancy

Bombaci explicitly groups *Nightwood* with *Freaks* and *Day of the Locust* (along with

McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*) as a text populated and defined by otherly-bodied and

liminal subjects:

> In exploring 'freakishness,' these artists locate the similarities and differences between
>
> those who are born freaks and those who, through strenuous effort, aim to become freaks
>
> by identifying with human oddities. Characters in narratives by Nathanael West, Djuna
>
> Barnes, Tod Browning, and Carson McCullers not only exhibit a fascination with the
>
> genetically maimed and distorted, but fetishize this difference. This fetishization… is
>
> based not on a prurient objectification of freakish bodies, but on a desire to know and
>
> experience the subjectivity of marginalized others. In a period of American culture beset
>
> with increasing pressures for social and political conformity and with the threat of
>
> fascism from Europe, narratives that fetishize the freak defy oppressive norms and values
>
> as they search for an anarchic and transformational creativity. (Bombaci 1)

At the center of *Nightwood*'s economy of images is this "marginalized other," which for our

purposes can be synonymous with the *monstrous body*. Such images are most typically deployed

by Barnes as the otherly-bodied peoples of the circus but also in the general grotesqueries of so-

called "marginal" identities like Jews, homosexuals, and non-European non-whites. As

Loncraine puts it, *Nightwood* occurs in an "atmosphere of spiraling anti-Semitism, rising

fascism, and an underground bohemian expatriate community peopled by outsiders" (Loncraine

298).

Winkiel usefully lists the "limits of the human" explored by the freakish bodies of P. T. Barnum's American Museum, and notes how the circus "restored a biological continuity denied by scientific thought and, in general, by modernity" (Winkiel 18). These individuals challenged the limits of body size, of gender difference or stability, of culturally "constructed" or "augmented" bodies like the tattooed man, of biological/generic categorization (e.g. animal-people like the Feejee mermaid), and of the limits of the individual in "oddities" like conjoined twins (Winkiel 9). Barnes catalogue of "freakish" bodies resembles West's. *Locust* was preoccupied with embodying the degenerative traits of modern mass-culture, and Barnes's menagerie contains many similar expressions.

In *Nightwood*, miscegenation and breeding can stand as inversions of the eugenic "spirit" present in *Locust*. For Barnes's characters, the preoccupation is about lineage. Felix, son of the "Baron" Guido Volkbein, spends his life trying to be attached to a cultural legacy that is unbeknownst to him a falsification. "Passing" as Christians, Felix and his son Guido are described "heavy with impermissible blood" (Barnes 5).[19] Guido the younger is a bona-fide monster in the teratological tradition. He suffers from undiagnosed birth defect: "The child was small, a boy, and sad. It slept too much in a quivering palsy of nerves; it made few voluntary movements; it whimpered" (Barnes 52). The narrator's tone and the aggregate images and

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[19] This is as good a place as any to mention that Felix is blind in one eye, and plays about with his monocle in a manner which draws attention to his one-eyed-ness. His likeness then to the Cyclops is difficult to avoid, especially in the monstrous context of *Nightwood* and especially when we realize (as we will come to do later in this dissertation) that cinematic conceptions of the monstrous are often brought into contrast with classical monster "archetypes." Felix's Polyphemic "I" marks him undeniably as a monster, and an abomination.

discussions of miscegeny and bestiality in the novel suggest that these defects are the result of miscegenation: either across racially constructed boundaries –i.e., Felix's duplicitous racial/religious identity—or across species (we will see Robin dually exists as woman and beast. Guido, longing for the church, represents a kind of biological degeneration but also a "holy" birth, a relic, "born to holy decay. Mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death" (Barnes 114). According to the old European order, Guido's birth would have been, however monstrous, a portentous birth, one indicating some divine message or intervention into the human community. Barnes uses this image to mock that old order as it rests in the person of Felix; instead of signifying divine mystery, Guido instead embodies the absence or lack of the divine in the modern, his whimpering and silence furthers his removal from the polyglot cultural system of the expatriate community and the cosmopolitan urban centers wherein these various modernisms (and other exiles) aggregated. Even Guido's birth is an occasion for horror, blasphemy, and the display of the "monstrous feminine," those abject associations with female bodies around which Barbara Creed claims our culture has designated ideas of order, cleanliness, and the like: "Amid loud and frantic cries of affirmation and despair Robin was delivered. Shuddering in the double pains of birth and fury, cursing like a sailor, she rose up upon her elbow in her bloody gown, looking about her in the bed as if she had lost something. 'Oh, for Christ's sake, for Christ's sake!" she kept crying like a child who has walked into the commencement of a horror" (Barnes 52).

Compare the degenerative physical silence of Guido (a living hieroglyph of Robin and Felix's abortive attempt at union) to Robin's "primitive" or bestial refusals of articulation and language, as the latter has been designated as a subversive act of resistance against the Symbolic order

redolent of "multiplicity, organicism, and perpetual change" (Rohman 58).[20] Felix, for instance,

walks in on Robin holding the baby and his perception is that she is going to "dash it down" (51).

The narrator does not confirm this suspicion but the reader must confront this eugenic impulse of

Robin's in the wake of the Modern preoccupation with eugenics, breeding, and evolution. [21]

This monstrous birth may also be symptomatic of the novel's transgendered, transsexual, and

homosexually–oriented bodies and communities, the "inverted" men and women who make up

the novel's central characters (Robin, Nora, and Jenny, as well as the Doctor) who are clearly

operating outside of a system ordered on reproductive hierarchies and desires. Nora and Robin

embody their inversion; Robin is "a tall girl with the body of a boy," for instance (Barnes 50).

Physical descriptions of Robin further complicate her portrait, as I shall show. The lack of a

"plot" in *Nightwood* can be considered the stylistic accompaniment to all of these disordered

bodies. As Tim Armstrong notes, the novel "cannot offer any integrating discourse, written as it

is from a position of programmatic marginality in which all gendered constructions of the body

are mocked, and abjection used to render a critique of the discourse of the hysteric" (Armstrong

28).

O'Connor is a transvestite, itself a marginalized or outsider identity that could serve the

function of the monstrous in its interstitiality and boundary crossing. However, O'Connor's

transvestism is portrayed as particularly grotesque and is therefore not only a "symbolic" or

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[20]   Rohman's sustained investigation of Barnes's "privileging of the 'beastly' elaborates on Robin's

resistance to language and the symbolic order, reinforcing Robin's status as not fully or not entirely

human.

[21]   See here Bradshaw on eugenics and in Woolf in particular (Bradshaw *Concise Companion to*

Modernism 34).

signifying monstrosity but a physical one saturated in the language and machinery of the abject.

Firstly, the Doctor has a reputation for performing abortions (what Felix delicately describes as

cases which are "well, illegal" (Barnes 122). As an unlicensed gynecologist, O'Connor is by

definition a party to the abject, and his participation in the abortion trade represents a taboo not

only of religious nature but also one enforced by the rapidly technologizing and phallocentric

colonization of female sexuality by the medical establishment.[22] The compulsive and irrational

flood of language which characterizes Dr. O'Connor is one example of this gendered-abjection,

in both its undifferentiated and borderless pathology (that is, its non-sense) and in its frequently

abject subject matter. Take for instance his description of "old Paris" in the morning, a portrait of

the Old order of Europe as a continuous display of bodily expulsion and mingling female and

male humours: "everything gutters for miles and miles … dawn saw good clerks full of piss and

vinegar, and blood-letting in the side streets, where some wild princess in a night-shift of velvet

howled under a leech; not to mention… the night trip of late kings letting water into plush cans

and fine woodwork" (Barnes 88). His quarters, too, are a monstrous mixture of medicine and

lust, science and "perversion," precision and control and artifice and eruption.

> a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not
>
> place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges,

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[22]   That abortion is a taboo and produces abjected human bodies (or abject *material*) is a position I take

solely for the case of identifying O'Connor with the various notions of the "monstrous" which were

sutured to the various modernisms of Barnes's community and times, and I disavow any implication on

the question of whether or not a fetus is a body, a subject, a human, or any other ideological construct. For

the purposes of this essay abortion is symbolic of the human functions repressed by the day-today

operations of the modern, urban civil space.

powder boxes and puffs… laces, ribbons, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an

abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery.

A swill pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations. (Barnes 85)

Through this grotesque man-machine intervention into waste and abjected matter, O'Connor

encounters the modernist cosmopolis with "the glittering eyes of a creature half leprechaun, half

angel, half freak, half savant, half man, half woman" (Winterson xiii). That is, O'Connor is a

heterogeneous mixture of unmatching parts that is bound up in images of bodily function,

expulsion, and repression; he will later in the novel compare himself to an unearthed corpse, the

ultimate human abjection, and one that has further admixed with plant life and been reduced to

its constituent parts: "I was doing well enough… until you kicked my stone over, and out I came,

all moss and eyes" (Barnes 162). The figure of O'Connor thus characterizes the modernist desire

"to clarify and regulate" as a fool's errand, an abomination, a horror show.

O'Connor may be primarily characterized by his speech but his chimerical body echoes both

the bestial bodies of the Robin and Jenny (to come) and those augmented and bestial

"primitives" who populate the circus. An early, minor character who the reader only knows

through the anecdote of O'Connor is Nikka, and African who fights bears in the *Cirque de Paris*

and is covered in tattoos – the "*amebleument* of depravity" (Barnes 19).[23] His exaggerated

sexuality and black skin make him a symbol of primitivism and Otherness for his Parisian

audience, but his tattoos are predominantly European and allusive rather than non-Western and

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[23]   My characterization of Nikka as *minor* may be suspect, as he is given significant interpretive

attention in the critical conversation on *Nightwood*. I submit that he is minor because of the small amount

of attention that Barnes devotes to him. See Kaviola "The Beast Turning Human" and Marcus 145-149,

for instance.

primitive. They feature quotes from Prince Arthur Tudor, a Jansenist inscription from "the book

of magic", and an angel from Chartres among Rotheschildean roses, a ship in sail, and various

phallic puns (Barnes 19-20).[24] Kaviola presents Nikka as an example of Barnes's interest in

liminality and agency that "is not predetermined," a monster who uses Western symbols to create

his own meaning and is therefore not entirely "appropriated and contained" (Kaviola 178).[25]

Nikka "blurs boundaries" and allows his audience "the pleasure and horror of considering the

stability of the boundaries separating man and beast" (Kaviola 177). Nikka thus provides both a

link to figures like Queequeg in *Moby Dick* (also a tattooed "savage" whose essential nobility

despite his 'horrific' form results from his control over his own identity) and the sexualized

chimera-body of Miguel from *Locust*.

Nikka's body is visibly hybrid and bestial, a strategy that Barnes deploys towards both Robin

and Jenny –with particular nastiness in the case of the latter. Jenny's role as a harpy or at least as

a hybrid animal/woman is undeniable given the narrator's consistent deployment of bird-

imagery. She is first described as having "a beaked head and the body, small and feeble, and

ferocious, that somehow made one associate her with Judy [a la Punch and Judy]" (Barnes 71).

She "molts" and has "partridge blood" with "a smell about her of mouse-nests" (Barnes 104-

105). Her attraction to Robin and Nora's love is compared to a bird "snatching the oats out of

love's droppings," further associating her with the abject expulsions of the body (Barnes 107).

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[24]   The Jansenist quote is of course heretical, doubling the exponential value of the tattoo as a taboo;

making a permanent mark on the skin is banned in Leviticus (Marcus 145).

[25]   Winkiel usefully identifies the tattoos themselves as symbols out of the slave trade alluding to the

"historical positioning of black labor and black obedience to domination," though they are displayed

ironically on Nikka's body (22).

Jenny is the harpy from the *Liber Monstrarum:* "It is read that there have been certain monsters,

Harpies, on the islands of Strophades in the Ionian Sea, in the form of birds, but with the faces of

maidens. And they could speak in human language, and were always insatiable with gnawing

hunger, and with their hooked feet they snatched food from the hands of those eating" (Orchard).

(*Freaks* literalizes the harpy-figure when Cleopatra is turned into the "duck woman" – see Fig.

1.3.) Jenny, "the squatter," covets the pasts of others and thus suffers from an insatiable hunger

like the harpies. Most importantly, though is the idea that her "parts" are associated with *the*

animal (birds) and therefore the inhuman, and her heterogeneity is therefore marked as a state of

degeneration and repulsion: her head and body do not "go together. Only severed could any part

of her be called 'right'" (Barnes 71).

 Fig 3: Cleopatra, the harpy

This can be contrasted starkly with Robin, who (although she has a bird's name) is portrayed as

both a primitive or bestial animal-woman but as such as a figure of resistance, power, and

attraction to the other characters in the novel. Robin is a quilt of monstrous images, a chimerical figure in the classical sense.

Robin, as the connective tissue for these characters the novel's central object of desire, demonstrates various traits of monstrosity and the abject. She is 'outside the human type'—a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain; like the paralyzed man in Coney Island… who had to lie on his back in a box, but the box was lined with velvet, his fingers with stones, and suspended over him where he could never take his eyes off, a sky-blue mounted mirror, for he wanted to enjoy his own 'difference'" (Barnes 155). In this description we see the matrix of associations that *monstrosity* will conjure for Barnes, among them atavism, willful freakery and preformed subjectivity – but also self-idealization, beauty, and vitality in combination with degeneracy.

The narration first introduces Robin as the cause for a late night call from Dr. O'Connor. He and Felix find Robin passed out in bed, and she variously resembles a corpse, a mermaid, or a fungus:

> That perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of the earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous, and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a body of water—as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations—the troubling structure of the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds… (Barnes 38)

Robin is a kind of a golem here, a clay-like figure being commanded to life by O'Connor, between the world of the living and the underworld. As a "corpse" Robin is associated with both decay and its ensuing fecundity; her abjection is both generative and degenerative. Young Guido will exist in a similar state of walking-death. The "two-worlds" in which Robin exists are the worlds of sleep and wakefulness, but also the in being variously fish- or fungus-like, she also strides between the worlds of the "human" and the "inhuman." That Robin is a sleepwalker is also significant given the themes of mesmerism, sleepwalking, and waking-dream states established as traits of cinema-horror in *Caligari* and later as indications of vampiric possession in films like *Dracula* et al (*La Somnambule* is the title of the chapter that introduces Robin). The sleepwalker is of course also an automaton and a zombie, and therefore we can align within Robin's abjecting body the "troubling structures" of both biological waste (e.g. decaying "earth-flesh") and mechanized motion. Embodying the abject, Robin is also associated with cannibalism and infection, a vampiric figure who interrupts bloodlines. She is described by the narrator as a "beast turning human," and therefore a kind of predatory threat to the notions of evolution (and self-improvement) contemporary to Barnes's milieu (41). "Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past… we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers" (Barnes 41). Robin's vampire-nature furthers her disconnection from the world of language and reason (she is neither dead nor alive), but also further skewers the would-be aristocrat Felix: *Dracula*, in which the count is played as an aristocratic old-world European, capitalized on both fear of infection and in the supposed decadence of post-war Europe. Such a monster works to dismantle the cultural machinery that determines inclusion or exclusion, cleanliness and uncleanliness, production and waste – to determine human and non-human. Barnes characterizes both the

aristocratic old guard (Felix) and their emerging opposites (socially, sexually, and culturally 'mobile' Robin) as *monstrous*, and there fore sets in motion an equation where the human is always already the inhuman.

Robin's "demonstration" of blood and bloodline further complicates the monstrous body as a source of meaning in *Nightwood*. Emblematic of the abject, blood (and blood imagery) is streaked all over the carpet of *Nightwood*. Consider for instance the contents of the apartment of Felix's parents, Hedvig and Guido, the description of which sprawls across three pages: "Hedvig had played the waltzes of her time with the masterly stroke of a man, *in the tempo of her blood*, rapid and rising—that quick manliness of touch associated with the playing of the Viennese, who, though pricked with the love of rhythm, execute its demands in the duelling [sic] manner)"; there is also the "thick dragon's-blood pile of rugs from Madrid," (Barnes 10). The study features two large desks "in rich and bloody wood" as if they are living things, and the venetian blinds "were of that particularly somber shade of red so loved by the Austrians…" (Barnes 8) The description continues, including the portraits of Guido's fake "ancestors", which were purchased as "an alibi for the blood" (Barnes 10). Robin is significantly wounded by Jenny in the coach (and of course is the source of the blood-soaked sheets accompanying Guido's birth, as mentioned above). Blood may be the e true subject of *Nightwood*. Jeffery Cohen usefully rhapsodizes about the complex significance of blood in medieval texts. "As coagulant," he writes, "blood is the very corporeality that materializes identity and makes it real":

> It is history's anchor to the body. But as fluctuant blood is constant movement, a
> promiscuous violator of boundary. Possessed of a dual nature, acting as both inertial
> force and catalyst to unexpected change, blood is no mere symbol or metaphor for
> community. Blood is community made flesh. Alive with the detritus of inherited forms,

inexhaustible in its combinatory vitality, blood is perpetually forming new admixtures,

new hybrids, new monsters. (Cohen 2006: 16).

Blood is therefore in *Nightwood* both the symbol of the existing order and the utopian possibility

of change, of escaping both the traditional sense of the self as part of a collective and the modern

desire to rationalize the individual body as a form to be controlled. In hybridizing the human and

the inhuman, Barnes flings the body backwards into atavism and forwards into some unimagined

posthuman ideal.[26]

    One significant difference in approach between *Locust* and *Nightwood* is that the latter

features very little if any direct reference to cinema technique, tradition, or influence. The

mechanical process of the film apparatus is, however, embedded in the text via a series of images

and descriptions of Nora from her admirers. Felix, looking back at their marriage, tells O'Connor

"I never did have a really clear idea of her at any time. I had an image of her, but that is not the

same thing. An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties." (Barnes 119). Winkiel

connects this space-between-certainties to the speed and image constraints of motion pictures

and film technology, with human perception creating a "persistence of vision" wherein there are

really a series of separate images flashed rapidly in sequence (Winkiel 23). It is difficult to

determine if this image casts Robin as an allegory for the cinematic-subject or rather

characterizes Felix's difficulty in adjusting to the new aesthetics and politics of 'seeing' that the

techno-spectacle of film and mass culture required. Armstrong identifies in the mechanical

processes of cinema a simultaneous idealization of the organic: film offered a regenerative way

of perceiving the modern self, insofar as "a visual illusion which exploits the limits of

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[26]   See again Carrie Rohman for an investigation into the posthuman trajectories of *Nightwood* via a

resistance to language.

perception, but which also offers the cinematic body as a recompense for the fragmented body of technology" (Armstrong 5). In casting Robin as a film-image, then, we are forced then to perceive it among her other chief characteristics: a refusal of language, a liminal human/inhuman body, and an attraction to hybridity and bestial bodies. This filmic quality can actually be reconciled with Robin's organic, animal nature if we remember that cinema was able to recast the "fragmented body" of the machine age as body-in-motion, a body both "whole and in pieces," and that this new way of seeing affected both painting and poetry, for instance, Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" (1911). Or, as Susan McCabe points out, even as mechanical reproduction ultimately erodes immediacy and wholeness, early film carved out new spaces for the dislocated body and revivified sensation" (McCabe 10).

Nora too sees Robin as a cinematic body in a dream sequence:

> Nora dreamed that she was standing at the top of a house, that is, the last floor but one—this was her grandmother's room—an expansive, decaying splendour…. Standing, Nora looked down into the body of the house, as if from a scaffold, where now Robin had entered the dream, lying among a company below. …A disc of light, which seemed to come from someone or thing standing behind her and which was yet a shadow, shed a faintly luminous glow around the face of Robin (Barnes 67-68).

The links between dreams and cinema are well established (and had more literally pursued by the surrealists like Buñuel). Robin walks between sleep and wakefulness, and therefore cannot be comprehended as either asleep or awake. In Nora's dream-work, Robin's interstitiality can be seen in better perspective – in this case, from a director's chair in front of which Robin is staged and lit, an organic whole of decaying splendor. When Robin leaves, Nora's conception of herself crumbles. "Nora is struck by the violence of the cinematic gaze that undoes her" (Winkiel 26).

While *The Day of the Locust* displays a cinema-culture (and its film-bodies) as explosive, violent, collective, and "truly monstrous," *Nightwood* displays the monstrous body as a generative alternate to the decaying atavism of the bourgeoisie body-politic. Their struggle against the prevailing forms of the day (both the high culture expectations of the modern novel and the "popular culture" demands of a scenario-hungry motion picture industry) take on the eruptive and estranging forms of the monster. As a response to the social changes and attitudes we call modernism – and a response to that response – Barnes and West incubated a new form to attend to new discourses. As Fredric Jameson notes,

> the point is not only that emergent artists of modernism have no social status or institutional social role except as ill-defined positions within the *bohème*, not yet even intellectuals in any strict sense; it is also that their works are increasingly unclassifiable, and begin to resist the commercial categories of the genres in an effort to distinguish themselves from commodity forms at the same time that they invent various mythic and ideological claims for some unique formal status which has no social recognition or acknowledgement. (Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 159)

The mythical status they sought to re-create as artistic figures inadvertently spawned freakish doubles. The monstrous modernisms of West and Barnes thus establish the stylistic avenues and thematic patterns at work in a group of texts which we will consider next, works that reenact this modernist interrogation of form via a cinematic model of horror and monstrosity: biological identification, played out in the tropes of eugenicist discourse and the legacies of institutional racism and miscegenist "terror" partial to the various American regionalisms; physical hybridity via the discourses of said miscegenation, as well as disfigurement (the formal disfigurements of

"unreadability" and "gigantism," to name two) as well as recombinant/cybernetic bodies (common to both the post war experience of amputees and the postmodern "advent" of cybernetic bodies); formal concerns reflected in both the concept of the "new work" (the nouveau roman, the New Wave, the "post" modern) and the postmodern anxiety over embodiment (a development of late modernism and perhaps more accurately the significant telos of postmodern subjectivity—that is, a teleology bridging the modern subject with the posthuman subject). In one way then, *Locust* can be read as a prototype of the posthuman narrative, a sort of "archaeopteryx" in the literary fossil record marking the end of the modern novel as such as the form, however protean one might consider its nature, that best embodies the content of the humanist (middle class) self conscious and its ensuing concerns. By invoking the monster as an ideal form—the animated (or reanimated) machine, the hybrid body, the collective disfigurement—the standing categories of literary transmission are those boundaries which the monster is invoked to violate. The allegorical invocation of this monster through content and style brings attention, however, to the form of *Locust* and *Nightwood*: without "center," without "plot," and seemingly a collage of episodes and characterizations, these works flaunt their imperfect seams, heterogeneous "creatures" that can barely be contained by their imperfectly joined boundaries.

CHAPTER III

THE POSTMODERN CREATURE-FEATURES OF THOMAS PYNCHON

If the historical factor that most significantly marked the aesthetic shift into modernism was

World War I, then surely the second world war was the after-shock that caused a second great

epistemological shift, that "when it all changed" moment that can be used to mark the historical

progression into a post-modernism. Paul Fussel has elaborated on how the great war inaugurated

the "gross dichotomies" of the modern imagination in his *The Great War and Modern Memory*

(Fussell 78). Cultural shifts and technological advances create new ways of meaning, being, and

seeing; the great innovation which inspired artists towards new forms (fragments, streams of

consciousness, expressionism, and the decoupage surrealisms, constructivisms, and cubisms) for

a new "kind of meaning" was, according to Fussell, the "new industrialized mass trench

warfare": poison gas, tanks, machine guns, barbed wire, and the various bureaucratic wastelands

of trench-life (Fussell 139). If World War II was able to create another "way-of-seeing," then the

technological expressions of that break came in the extermination camps and in the atomic

bomb. And fast on the heels of the Second World War came the Korean War, ushering in another

development: that of the US war industry and the approaching state of constant war.

Concomitant with these developments was widespread American prosperity. David Skal

observes that "World War II had claimed the lives of over 40 million soldiers and civilians, and

had introduced two radical new forms of mechanized death –the atomic bomb and the

extermination camp—that seriously challenged the mind's ability to absorb, much less cope

with, the naked face of horror at mid-century" Skal *Horror Show* 230). The post-atomic

gigantisms of the 1950s changed most monster—and horror-films into a boundary-crossing bit of

science fiction and spectacle; the flagship pictures of these irradiated colossi are *Them!* (1954)

and the Japanese giant-monster movie (*kaiju eiga*) exemplified by Godzilla in *Godzilla, King of

Monsters* (1954).

   The various right-wing nationalisms (and military expansionism) of the thirties – the forces

that made world war inevitable – created a more rigid, self-centered national identity which by

its nature created a world of threatened borders, divisive ethnic and national identities – which of

course encourages a monstrous reaction. An "Emperor-centered ideology" (see McClain) makes

everyone outside of that thinking a monster, subhuman. Japan, in its aggression with China

during the 1920s and 1930s, created a culture that would, after its defeat, see itself in terms of

victimhood. The stronger the lines of national identity are drawn, the less room there is for

variation and possibility, and monsters sprout in the popular imagination erupt outward. This is a

kind of reversal of Kracauer's thesis in *From Caligari to Hitler* (or if you will a kind of an

analeptic step in the chronology): it is not Monster movies and Weimar cinema that creates

National Socialism, but conservative, aggressive national politics that create the need for

monsters. Nationalism creates monsters, and not only of the Goya-esque "sleep of reason"

variety in the from of the Nationalists themselves; rather, the ideological categories become so

rigid that it becomes easier and easier to see the natural expressions of hybridity and cross-

culturalism that exist in the lived, human world become forced outside of the standing categories of nationalism into the borderland of *alien*, *unknown* and *subhuman*. For every citizen produced by such a nationalist movement, another monster is created out of the individuals who cannot fit that model of citizen ship.   So those who "pass" (e.g. German Jews in Hitler's Germany, antebellum light-skinned blacks in the US, etc) become more of a threat and take on monstrous characteristics. We see the chimerical results in wartime propaganda – e.g. in the pot-bellied, bat-winged, forked-tongued caricatures of Jews and Bolsheviks, featuring also tentacles and cloven feet and in the buck-toothed rodent faces of "Japs" in American propaganda.

As an incitement for monsters, these developments in warfare and resultant edifying of national identity created easily identified patterns: immediately after the war, monsters were concentrated as anxieties of the atomic age and Communism. These were the new, gigantic, and "naked" anxieties of dehumanization (via radiation and "science" as opposed to the mechanization-fears of the 1920s and 1930s) and of the loss of individuality implied by the industrialized death of the holocaust or through the threats of Communism. These fears were not mere specters attributed to McCarthy-brand anti-Communism, of course; consider (as does Fussell) that, on the mass death provoked by the second world war, "You might as well be an inert item of Government Issue, like a mess kit or a tool, …anonymity and uniformity had become so insistently the style of the period that few would have smiled at the oxymoron *proud anonymity*." (Fussell wartime 70, emphasis in original).

Out of this proud anonymity blossomed a nostalgia for the monster films and creature features of the thirties and forties; perhaps as leverage against the "naked horrors of mid-century," this nostalgia took the form of televised creature-features and an ameliorization of "monsters" and "creeps" as part of a kind of rock and roll / counter culture freakery made safe for children.

Images of classic movie monsters like Dracula, the Wolfman, the Mummy, et cetera found their way into the drive-in culture of B movies and in the toys, models, and other amusements of for children. In one way the exploded view of a monster in the instruction sheets accompanying the Aurora monster model kits of the 1950s illustrated a hybrid diagram of the atomic imagination and the desire for monstrosity – and a prelude to the psychedelic "deconstruction" of perceived reality encouraged by psychotropic drugs and what would become the "drug culture" of the west coast.
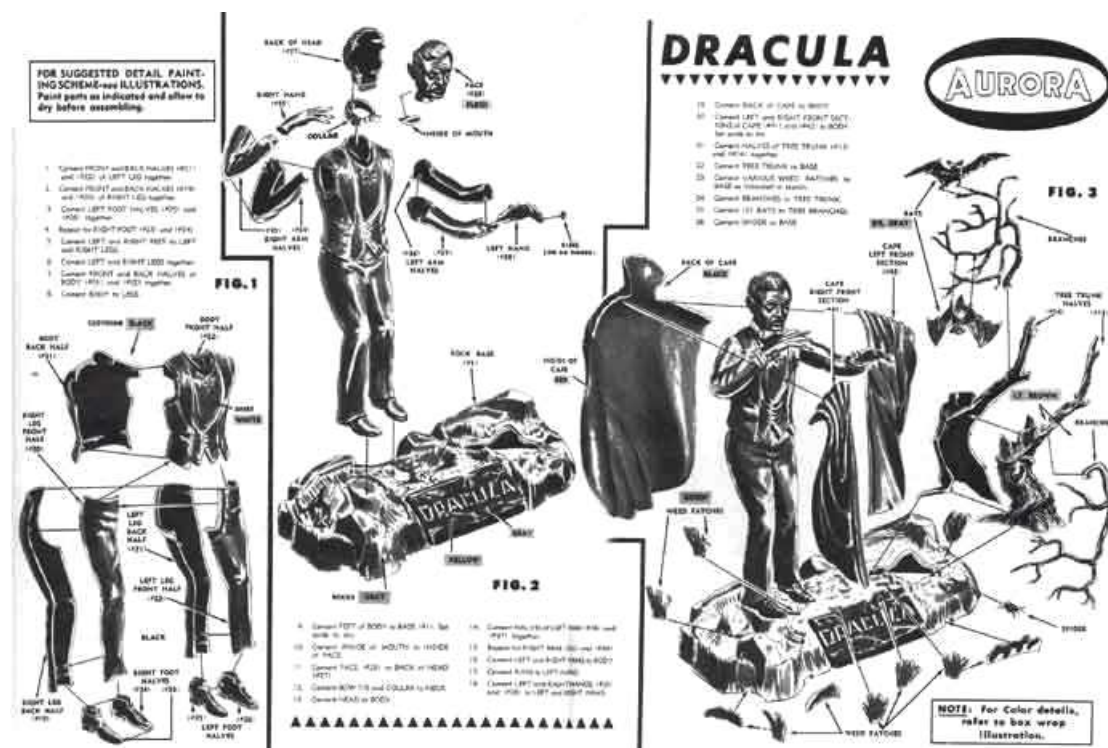

Fig. 4: *the atomized Count Dracula of the Aurora company monster model kit.*

As monsters became the stuff of teen gross-out and beatnik caricature, underground comics and drug-culture camp, they came to be identified with the growing culture of irony which writers like Thomas Pynchon had come to use as a weapon against the uniformity and anonymity of the square culture. David Foster Wallace, writing about the influence of TV on the "hyperrealism" of the 1980s and 1990s, notes that the "black humor" ironies of postmodern writers like Pynchon, Barth, and Gaddis reflected a "wider shift in U.S. perceptions of how art was supposed to work, a transition from art's being a creative instantiation of real values to art's being a creative rejection of bogus values" (Wallace 59). This rhetorical position was "deeply informed by the emergence of television and the metastasis of self-conscious watching" (Wallace 21). Within this artistic phenomenon, a "knowing irony" about the roles of consumer- and pop-culture references acted not only as a nod towards the realist tradition of modernism – our world was so inundated with TV and film that their casual reference in literature marked an attempt at expressing "realistic" expressions of the world – but also allowed them to poke fun at the plastic insubstantiality of it all. Movie monsters thus outline a complex protocol of meanings, indicating nostalgia, irony, and trauma; the subversive marginality and rock-and-roll rebellion of such icons is nevertheless recognized for being an accessory to the official culture's commandeering of those very subversions.

So we come to recognize the golden age movie monsters as creatures of modernism and the anxieties of creating new forms, and as part of the modernist reaction to the horrors of modernity, technology, and the global collisions of cultures as well as the shrinking borders of both national identity and personal perception. This legacy will be transformed and the monstrous emblems put to use in different ways by Thomas Pynchon, whose *Gravity's Rainbow* offers another case of formal monstrosity (gigantism, combinatorialism/chimericalism, violation

of categories and genres, etc) that Pynchon seizes upon the very same monstrous films and figures as West is surely no accident, as those figures not only become iconoclastic and "mythical" actors of a new narrative media (film) but also become a sign of modernism itself. Pynchon uses these signs as contested sites wherein the legacy of modernism upon literature and science can be dramatized and inside which that legacy must struggle with its transformative powers. When Pynchon opens with an epigraph from Werner von Braun upon the transformative powers of death, we can map onto that comparison the modernist "break" with tradition and the postmoderns as 'life after death': Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death" (Pynchon 1).[27]

CREATURE-FEATURES: *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*

One should expect to find movie monsters percolating to the surfaces of *Gravity's Rainbow*[28] given the novel's convergent interest in the images, narrative strategies, and cultural implications of "Golden Age" Hollywood cinema and "occult" spirituality like the Tarot, Kabbalic ritual, and other pagan or pre Christian myths, practices, and beliefs. Firstly, the novel consistently makes use of a "filmic" or cinematic style, and there are (secondly) numerous and varied references to

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[27]   Weisenberger and Black, to name a few, see this epigraph as ironic, as von Braun is one of those responsible for the proliferation of missile technology in the arms race but, in the passage from which the quote originates, argues for an ethical imperative to scientific research and human interaction.

[28]   Ellipses in brackets are editorial, while un-bracketed ellipses are those which appear in Pynchon's original.

specific films, film genres and performers, film history and film technology. *Gravity's Rainbow*

utilizes not only the allusive value of these references to build its "encyclopedic" network of

information and bricolage, but also the generic and narrative conventions of these films.[29] Given

the emphasis on film content and technique as well as specific references and name-droppings,

Gravity's Rainbow integrates into its self a monstrous menagerie containing creature-features

both classic and obscure, Golden Age and post-war: the book mentions by name *Frankenstein*

(591), *The Son of* (and *The Bride of*) *Frankenstein* (106 and 591), *Freaks* (106), *Dracula* (37 and

652), *Doktor Mabuse der Spieler* (aka *Doctor Mabuse the Gambler*, 500, 517, 579),[30] *The*

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (385), *The Curse of the Mummy* (139), *White Zombie* (106) and *King*

Kong (various). Indirectly, the book resonates with allusion to post-war monster movies like

Creature from the Black Lagoon, *Godzilla*, *The Blob*, and *The Mole People*.[31]

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[29]   See Mendelson, "Gravity's Encyclopedia" on Pynchon's encyclopedism.

[30]   Dr. Mabuse does not feature 'monsters' as such but can be considered part of the German

expressionist pantheon of fantasy/horror films that are viewed as seminal to the gothic horror films to

come in the 1930s. David Kalat introduces the character in monstrous terms: "We encounter him in a

basement lair. Only underground could such a creature exist. But even here, on his turf, we cannot see

him clearly" (3). For more on the legacy of Mabuse, see Kalat.

[31]   I am forgoing a tremendous opportunity by omitting from this essay a summary of *The Mole People*

(1955) and the various and (seemingly) obvious similarities between it and *Gravity's Rainbow* –the

"leaping among the earthworks"; the monstrous cave-dwellers who have been exploited as slaves; the

uprising of that monstrous preterite against the old (very old) order of their "ancient Sumerian" ruler,; the

fascination of said Sumerians with death a-la *Gravity's Rainbow*'s Blicero – but I do so in the name of

limited space.

My aim herein is to identify and examine how *Gravity's Rainbow*'s movie-monsters *work*—
how they elucidate the novel's themes, how they interact with the other patterns of inclusion and
exclusion in content, and how they contribute to notions of style and form that make up the work
itself. I hope along the way to establish how they also subvert or resist any easy categorization
knowing as we do how monsters (and the elusive prankster who is in this case their author)
works against easy categorization and conspires with truth to keep its nature elusive.[32] Despite
the myriad dangers of isolating one episode, character, or "component" in *Gravity's Rainbow*
and attempting to extrapolate out from that, we can nonetheless identify some of the
iconographic images of the cinematic-monstrous at play in *Gravity's Rainbow*; I will argue that
they offer complex sites of thematic collision and conflation, hybrid figures that demonstrate a
concern with form and the modern tradition of myth-building. We can first identify some of the
more varied monster-movie tropes and patterns and then zoom in a bit and look at specific
instances of cinematic monstrosity and its varying functions in *Gravity's Rainbow*, including
Pynchon's use of these rituals of art-horror to grapple with the modernist tradition. (I will briefly
attempt a summary of *Gravity's Rainbow*; the good bits about mummies and giant apes appear
afterward).

Gravity's Rainbow most plainly concerns the search for knowledge and possession of the
physical and operational components surrounding the German rocket systems of WWII, both the
V-4 and or a mysterious experimental rocket know as the "00000." Of course, there is nothing

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[32]   Levi-Strauss on the thread common to the developments of Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Geology:
"all three demonstrate that understanding consists in reducing one type of reality to another; that the true
reality is never obvious; and that the nature of truth is already indicated by the care it takes to remain
elusive" (qtd Hume 25).

"plain" about any of it, as this plot device works through seemingly hundreds of characters, including the various military representatives of both the Allied and Axis forces and the various industrial and corporate cartels whose representatives appear on both sides of the conflict (a..k..a. "Them"); a tribe of displaced African-Germans known as the *Schwarzkommando,* also searching for rocket intelligence and components to build and fire their own V-2; various witches, devils and angels, black market double agents and smugglers, "dopers," and drunkards; and of course the questing fool/knight errant/ pig-hero American officer Lt. Tyrone Slothrop, whose sexual partners turn out to mark the contact points of all of the German V-2s that have fallen in London. The grander mystery, for Them, and the reason They pursue Slothrop, has something to do with the distribution of rocket technology after the war and the various matrices of information and technology which will eventually lead to the development of the missile technology and cold-war power lines. Eventually, a "counterforce" of misfits arises to resist the war profiteers.

To complicate the matter, the many characters and forces at work in the novel turn out to be strangely, improbably, and irresolvably connected to one another through various patterns of affiliation, behavior, shared history, or twinning/doubling. David Cowart provides a useful encapsulation of the various plot diversions, connections, and tangential quest stories that form the this wildly complex and inclusive novel:

> Politically, it concerns the unscrupulous manipulation of the weak by the powerful; economically, the conspiratorial abuses of the multinational corporations that may have actually engendered the war; and mythically, sacrifices leading to neither fructification nor resurrection—though the possibility of something like transcendence or transformation is hinted at.… [ontologically], the story concerns the inadequacy of cause-

and-effect models of the phenomenal world, and of cozy assumptions about the ultimate

reality of that world. (Cowart 1980, 32-33)

In this way, Pynchon's novel attributes the destruction of the war to the cartelization and

corporate globalization and colonization of science and scientific research, the shift towards a

decentralized power system that "ignores national boundaries" and is characterized by an

informational economy privileging data instead of commercial goods (Mendelson 1271-72). In

Zurich, the smuggler Semyavin laments to Slothrop "Life was simple before the first war [….] Is

it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of

exchange?" (258). As Weisenberger puts it, Pynchon's "core concern is with the status of the

individual in a system of increasingly state-integrated, rationalized, and internationalized

capitalism" (Weisenberger 58).

One symptom of this shift (and strangely enough, an 'escape' from that shift as well) is in the

popularity of cinema, and in its international success despite the various regional trends, styles,

and cinematic "languages" available to the various national cinemas between the wars. Ever keen

to the popular lingo and cultural ephemera of his fictional subjects, Pynchon coats *Gravity's*

Rainbow in a veritable cinematic protoplasm (indeed, some of this stems from film-buffery, as he

has professed a love of Japanese monster movies and once hoped to become a film critic for

Vanity Fair magazine). In reading *Gravity's Rainbow* we will operate under the assumption that

the narrative style is one observably influenced by film technique. David Cowart for instance has

detailed the various examples of cinematic technique that not only mark the voice of the narrator

but also create some of the structures of the novel itself. He argues that the novel is "structured"

like a movie, and uses the language of camera work and editing to filter his characters' point-of

view (Cowart 1980, 33). The novel is written in third person language of a script treatment, e.g. "They're bound eastward now, Roger peering over the wheel, hunched Dracula-style inside his Burberry" (Pynchon 37). See too the oft-quoted passage wherein Slothrop, in a paranoid delusion occurring while he deals with the smuggler Säure Bummer, has come to believe that he is inside an elaborate simulation that someone is secretly filming in an attempt to observe and capture him:

> Someone here is cleverly allowing for parallax, scaling, shadows all going the right way and lengthening with the day – but no, Säure can't be real, no more than these dark-clothed extras waiting in queues for some hypothetical tram, some two slices of sausage (sure, sure), the dozen half-naked kids racing in and out of this burned tenement so amazingly detailed—They sure must have the budget, all right. Look at this desolation, all built then hammered back into pieces, ranging body-size down to powder […] as that well-remembered fragrance Noon in Berlin, essence of human decay, is puffed on the set by a hand, lying big as a flabby horse up some alley, pumping its giant atomizer. . . .
>
> (374)

Slothrop's view that the war is a gigantic film or television set provides a unifying perspective for a novel that might otherwise succumb to an overload of characters, locales, and psychedelic interruptions. Cowart concentrates on Pynchon's references to art (including painting, film, and music) as evidence of stabilizing structures in the novel.[33] Throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*

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[33] His position is significant in terms because in doing so he attempts to disengage *Gravity's Rainbow* from the grip of "entropy criticism" in which most critics have read it; by concentrating on art rather than science, he further wishes to "augment and consolidate" critical reception of the book as a work of

Pynchon "demonstrates repeatedly that film can be every bit as real as life – that, indeed, life imitates the movie far more systematically than the other way around." (Cowart 1980, 9). So the cinematic technique and its implied confusions between real life and screen life contribute to the various paranoid theses of both Slothrop and the novel as whole. As Moore puts it, "[we] are free to think of the camera that is the sentence as Pynchon's own, filming *Gravity's Rainbow*, but the camera in it is filming a concentric reality" (Moore 37). Ernest Mathijs agrees, noting Pynchon's narrative style recalls Soviet Montage and Surrealist cut-up, and *Gravity's Rainbow*'s "mise-en-scène" can be compared to German Expressionists "whose films he mentions" (Mathijs 63).[34] Clerc goes it one step further, calling *Gravity's Rainbow* the first novel created out of the *auteur* approach to film criticism, and Pynchon its "director."

Not coincidentally do early works of German Expressionism appear on this list: they are contemporaneous with the setting, providing the fallen stars of pre-war Germany to appear as exiles and symbols of the old European order — especially the "proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years" before the second world war "*Opened it*" to be replaced by the Third Reich — and then of course to be 'unified' as Eastern and Western Germany (Pynchon 265). Greta Erdmann, a former darling of German cinema, functions in this role as exiled sex-symbol: the cold-faced "anti-Dietrich" and star of the pornographic/horror movie *Alpdrücken* (Pynchon's fictional Expressionist "classic" directed by Gerhardt von Göll) (394). Her association with violent sex (or at least with bondage and role-play) and horror

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possibility and hope as opposed to one of nihilism and apocalypse (Cowart, 8). This sense of possibility is important to the generative powers and utopian potentials I ascribe to film-monsters in this dissertation.

[34] Also useful in these investigations is Charles Clerc, "Film in Gravity's Rainbow" in *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*.

pictures re-orients the reader along the axis of monstrosity in *Gravity's Rainbow* towards that

modernist reaction to culture as in a state of decay and burial (*Erd* = "earth" or "soil"): the

modern "decadence" of Berlin in the twenties, the decay of what was considered Art (drama)

into a kind of debased medium ("the movies"), the decay of the human image once captured on

film and then accelerated by the decay of the film stock itself, and the repressed "dirt" of human

culture, death that has fallen under the domain of control and mechanization. Pynchon riffs on

this idea of the film stock reflecting a human decay in Emulsion J, a fictional film stock

developed by von Göll which shows the "true face" just below the skin: "With Emulsion J he

could dig beneath the skin colors of the contestants, dissolve back and forth between J and

ordinary stock, like sliding in and out of focus, or wipe—how he loved wipes!" (387-88).

German Expressionism also acted as a fecund source for genre pictures that would come

afterwards, notably in the copious film noir, futurist Sci-Fi, and monster movie cycles that would

spiral out of *Caligari* and *Metropolis* like so many fractal iterations. Robert Weine's *Cabinet of

Dr. Caligari* "seems to brood over the world of *Gravity's Rainbow* the way it brooded over

Germany between the wars," although it is only obliquely mentioned in the text (Cowart 1980,

37).[35] Weisenberger asserts throughout his *Companion* that Pynchon's source for German

cinema was Kracauer's 1945 *From Caligari to Hitler* (e.g. Weisenberger 107). Briefly, Kracauer

argues that German cinema after World War I "primed" the German people for fascism and

Hitler.[36] Pynchon thus can make use again of the tremendous impact of film on the imagination

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[35] "The men […] were sporting the Caligari gloves which now enjoy a summer vogue in the Zone"

(Pynchon 385)

[36] …or, as the useful entry on Wikipedia puts it, Kracauer "postulates that [*Caligari*] can be considered

as an allegory for German social attitudes in the period preceding World War II. He argues that the

and on the critical tradition that would have genre film as somehow entangled with or symptomatic of world events and larger cultural assumptions and or shifts. "Looks like German movies have warped other outlooks around here too," says Slothrop (474).

Add to these cinematic components of *Gravity's Rainbow* the many and various supernatural beings and monsters of all kinds. Think of the many ghosts present in the novel, some of whom are contacted directly via séance (through medium Carroll Eventyr): "They gather, thicker as the days pass, English ghosts, so many jostling in the nights, memories unloosening into the winter, seeds that will never take hold, so lost, now only an every-so-often word, a clue for the living" (138). These can include the Qlippoths, dumb, brute "shells" of beings who are hollow remnants of the shattered god-head, "emissaries from the world of the dead who stalk the familiar world" (Weisenberger 120). Slothrop also waltzes with the ghost of an English girl who he encounters in a play-house in an abandoned estate, briefly engaging in the Victorian tradition of ghost-tales involving children (282-83).[37] There are the many angels who appear, including the massive and apocalyptic Angel over Lübeck (of whom there is only Basher St. Blaise and his wingman, Terrance Overbaby witness). More giant angels appear in the form of what Hume describes as the "Rilkean angels" on the horizon watching Slothrop and Katje at the Casino Hermann Goering: "out near the burnished edge of the world, who are these visitors standing . . . these robed figures — perhaps, at this distance, hundreds of miles tall […] What have the watchmen of the world's edge come tonight to look for?" (214-15).[38] These angels and ghosts serve as

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character of Caligari represents a tyrannical figure, to whom the only alternative is social chaos (represented by the fairground).

[37]   For more on Pynchon's ghosts, see Daniel Punday. "Pynchon's Ghosts."

[38]   See also Brian McHale, "Gravity's Angels in America, or, Pynchon's Angelology Revisited."

emissaries from another world, observers and heralds of the social and physical apocalypse that the holocaust makes possible.

Werewolves, too, play out as patterns in the text both as explosions of bestial energy and as degradations into non-Human brutes: "Blicero had grown on, into another animal… a werewolf… but with no humanity left in its eyes" (486). Katje is compared by Slothrop to a werewolf in this same way, only in a more sexualized context of eruption and loss of humanity:

> She walks like a ballerina on her toes, thighs long and curving […] but the moonlight only whitens her back, and there is a dark side, her ventral side, her face, that he can no longer see, a terrible beastlike change coming over muzzle and lower jaw, black pupils growing to cover the entire eye space till whites are gone and there's only the red animal reflection when the light comes to strike. (196)

So for her part in the plot against Slothrop Katje is capable of an emptiness and coldness that terrifies Slothrop, but the werewolf image is not entirely one given over to Them. Tchitcherine, a Russian operative who tracks both Slothrop, has a transformative experience when he is a child by placing on a wolf-mask: he becomes The Wolf (390). Although Tchitcherine is in pursuit of Slothrop and therefore ostensibly an "enemy," he is also a virile and powerful figure, capable of acting outside of his the machinations of the conspiring forces of cartelization and Communist military interest, and his eventual union with the "good witch" Geli Trippling demonstrates that he is capable of acting in the interests of love and of nature. This the monster-figure of the werewolf brings Tchitcherine totemic power that need not necessarily degrade his subjectivity

but can instead act as a boon, and we begin to see monstrous figures as both terrifying and beneficial.[39]

There appear also witches, dwarves (of which, more later), demons, formless beasts, a giant Adenoid (which I will treat separately in my next chapter) and one yeti (in the form of seaman "Pig" Bodine). Terry Caeser identifies these and other monsters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, attributing to them a significant share in the novel's project of recuperating wonder and mystery in an otherwise overly-rationalized world: "these references to monsters serve Pynchon as representations for something wondrous and terrifying in experience, implacably there, outside as well as inside the mind …[The monstrous] affords access to the irreconcilable, the undifferentiated, the brutal, the superhuman, the indiscriminate—nature untouched by culture" (Caeser 159). Such a role is terribly important in a book like *Gravity's Rainbow*, wherein genre, history, jazz music, poetry, occultism, chemistry and physics collide and explode into and through one another, destroying long divisions between Art and Science that had invisibly structured post-war literature. Caesar claims that *Gravity's Rainbow* "utilizes the category of the monstrous in order to recoup the energies of the undifferentiated and destroy the structure of differences upon which human violence is based," and that "Monstrosity becomes a form of language by which the novel speaks of things which have no name and indicates a category of experience which has no other pattern but its own strangeness" (Caeser 162, 168). By deploying a veritable army of monstrous figures who reconcile formerly incommensurable categories, Pynchon is really just repeating the pattern established by the novel as a whole: a conjoining of

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[39]   *Werewolves* were Nazi "holdouts", swearing to continue fighting after the surrenders of V-E day (Weisenberger 326). Their presence in the Zone is indicated through *Gravity's Rainbow* by their graffiti & other propaganda.

film technique and literary aspiration. If *Gravity's Rainbow* assumes that film-reality is "more real" than lived experience, then movie monsters offer a kind of transcendent potential by being "more human than human."

By creating a structure which has "no other pattern but its own strangeness," *Gravity's Rainbow* both achieves and confounds the modernist legacy of literature to "make it new." This is because the book not only collapses categories but also suffers from an exaggerated gigantism via its aspirations to encyclopedic totality. It contained so much that its seams appeared to burst. "Indeed," Weisenberger writes, "the prevailing impression was that Pynchon's book stood on the landscape like a formless monster with little, if any, organizing skeleton" (3) *Gravity's Rainbow* "seems bent on rendering problematic all the discourses we associate with traditional and modernist fiction and presents us with an unknowable reality by means of an almost unknowable text" (Hume xi). This "unknowability" has through most of English-speaking history been figured as a monster, especially as a cartographic indication of the borders of the known. Pynchon is not ignorant of this tradition, as Slothrop's fantasy of a the Puritan settlement of the colonies running backwards like a film in reverse notes the sea monsters appearing at the edges, "creatures leaning in from the margins of the unknown" (204). Moore, for instance, concurs with the opinion of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s monstrosity, noting that the critical reception portrayed *Gravity's Rainbow* as "a book felt as inhuman" (Moore 65). This "unreadability" of the text becomes part of the modern legacy but also a challenge to its easy reliance on the tricks of invisible authorship, seamless shifts in perspective via narrative voice, or in the unadorned compressions and understatements of Hemingway and Cather on one hand and the imagist poetics of writers like William Carlos Williams on the other who strove to make a poem a closed system like a machine:

The fun [of reading *Gravity's Rainbow*], though humbling and perhaps a bit masochistic,

is to learn to watch the novel refuse to hold still as either an invented or reported system,

in either case aesthetically closed. The explicator's academy-conditioned illusion of a

fiction—of any imaginative system—as closed begins to break down… the novel has

already often enough been called unreadable by critics whose real problem, Richard

Poirier has observed, lies in it being too literary, rather than not literary enough, to

fathom the nature of the book's genius. (Moore 7)

The book's formal monstrosity goes a step further when Pynchon is viewed as a kind of mad-

scientist himself, a Victor Frankenstein who has created this challenging and deliberately

unknowable text that somehow flaunts the closed aesthetic monumentalism of the moderns while

towering over –in its exhaustiveness and inclusiveness – the very monuments to modern

literature that it is defies. In his refusal to create "living characters" (and instead rely on

caricature and archetype, in his insistence on slapstick and sophomoric gross-out grotesquery,

and in his determined anti-celebrity), Pynchon himself is cast as a monster, and elusive and

sadistic trickster who writes not 'novels' but some borderland obstacle that tries those fool

enough to enter its systems: he is Minos, who decreed the labyrinth be built; he is Daedalus, who

designed the labyrinth; and he is the Minotaur as well, hiding within the maze to mystify and

destabilize the experience. He is both famous and invisible, and has become an object of

folkloric speculation and rumor (e.g. he's actually Salinger) and of academic and popular

investigation and sleuthing (see for instance any issue of the journal *Pynchon Notes*, or the flaps

surrounding the efforts to photograph the elusive author). Moore conjectures: "Perhaps, as the

fantasy goes, he doesn't make 'real' characters because he can't; maybe, despite his novel's

constant advice to us about the need for human connection, Pynchon himself can't connect

sympathetically with the human world… being inhuman… he dehumanizes his characters…"

(Moore 64).

So given the filmic style and emphasis on *supernaturalism*, given the monstrous ritual of

entering *Gravity's Rainbow* -as-labyrinth, and in the wallowing in the abject and the

carnivalesque — *Gravity's Rainbow* is not just a movie – it's a monster movie. Who or what is

the monster? And who is the community that must confront him? *Gravity's Rainbow* becomes a

monster movie in a compulsion to participate in the myth making that moderns hope to return

their works to, with the monster-movie as a mythological or ritualistic structure in the same

tradition for which the modernists strove, but while Eliot and Conrad fell to the Fisher-King

myths and various Frazer-isms that anthropology and psychoanalysis had "discovered" for their

contemporaries, Pynchon turns to the popular material of genre film and comic books for the

psycho-sexual and spiritual contact with "the Unknown" that a monster film can provide.[40]

In addition to the various supernatural ghosts and creatures already mentioned, the numerous

direct references to classic creature and horror films creates a constant parade of monstrosity

through *Gravity's Rainbow*. For instance, one of the OSS operatives who train Katje to intercept

Slothrop is one Osbie Feel; she meets him one night while he is elaborately preparing some

hallucinogenic mushrooms. Doing so, Katje notes that he moves "with a fluid passage of fingers

and wrist based on the way Bela Lugosi handed a certain glass of doped wine to some fool of a

juvenile lead in *White Zombie*, the first movie Osbie ever saw and in a sense the last, ranking his

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[40]   David Seed, for instance, notes the similarities between Pynchon's and Conrad's use of an atavistic

descent into brutality and pre-civilization; the V-2 plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* quickly becomes "a

Conradian regression into the ancestral conscious of the novel's main characters" (Seed 157).

All-Time List along with *Son of Frankenstein*, *Freaks*, *Flying Down to Rio* and perhaps *Dumbo*"
(106). Weisenberger notes in passing that "in concentrating on modalities of life-after-death
(zombies) and mechanically induced life (Frankenstein's "monster") these films correspond with
Gravity's Rainbow's core themes" (83). But as I have suggested earlier, we can also see *White
Zombie*, *Freaks*, and *Frankenstein* as popular expressions of modernist anxiety over war-trauma,
the speed of technology, the automatism of mass-culture (and labor exploitation) and the cultural
power-shifts that occurred after the First World War.[41]

While the novel is full of these allusions, Pynchon once again seizes on the power of
Browning's *Freaks* later in the novel when Katje, having discovered the footage of her to be
used in training the octopus Grigori, also unearths a "screen test" that Osbie Feel has created for
a proposed film scenario, DOPER'S GREED (534-535). This scenario is rife with cinematic
references. For instance, it stars Basil Rathbone, S. K. Sakall and Harry Earls, who portrayed the
male lead Hans in *Freaks*. Rathbone is famous for portraying Sherlock Holmes in classics like
The Hound of the Baskervilles (1939) and adventure films like *Captain Blood* (1935) and *The
Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) alongside Errol Flynn in both. Rathbone also portrayed Baron
Wolf von Frankenstein in *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and performed in "B" movies like *Queen
of Blood* (1966).[42] The inclusion of Earls as the midget sheriff in this coded message from Osbie

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[41]   See also chapter II, noting the implications of Feel's Lugosi-esque flourishes of the hand and their
connection to *The Day of the Locust* and possibly Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.

[42]   Rathbone's co-star in Osbie's scenario is S. K. Sakall, a Hungarian actor who featured in many
German productions; American audiences recognize him from character roles like Carl in *Casablanca*
and Schwab in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (both 1942).

links the sequence to *Freaks* but also to Browning's earlier silent thriller *The Unholy Three* (1925).

Despite the temptation to dismiss DOPER'S GREED as drug humor (Feel's other big scene with Katje occurs while he is preparing hallucinogenic mushrooms), one can consider that it is meant a coded message for Katje, and in the "plot" of *Gravity's Rainbow* the characters of Doper's Greed serve allegorical roles: Rathbone for Feel, Sakall for Pointsman, Earl for the "scheme" itself" (535). So the silliness here resonates within a matrix of horror- and monster-movies — Osbie even informs Katje that "There's *Son of Frankenstein* in there too. Sorry we couldn't be more direct" (536). Feel regrets not being more direct in their message to Katje, but this is also an in-joke on, referring to the deliberate (though indirect) monster–movie references and reminding the audience of the monstrous "pedigree" of the actors chosen for this scenario.

Henry Earl is not alone, for there is no shortage of midgets in *Gravity's Rainbow.* Consider for instance "Fred Roper's Company of Wonder Midgets off to an imperial fair in Johannesburg, South Africa"(37), who Scorpia Mosmoon when she leaves Pirate Prentice; include in this list various references to Munchkins, gremlins, and assorted fairy- and little- peoples from various European folk traditions.[43]

Hume details the many "diminutive subraces" who appear in *Gravity's Rainbow*, e.g. pygmies, munchkins, dwarves, elves, gnomes, but finds no logic to their presence (Hume 62).

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[43]   "horrid...midgets, in strange operetta uniforms actually, some sort of Central European government-in-exile," (123); "Like a buncha happy midgets on a holiday!" (259); "They went off practically skipping obsessive as Munchkins, out into the erotic Poisson" (270); "Local midgetry scuttle and cringe alongside the tracks" (310); the "splendid retinue of dwarves and sprites" etc. (419); "…all those other worlds who send their dwarf reps out on the backs of eagles?" (664), et al.

Other than the connection to *The Wizard of Oz* (whose transformation into Technicolor and not-in-Kansas-anymore elements and feature prominently in chapter 3, "In the Zone"), these little people also appear as remnants of teratology, actual embodied "monsters" of the medieval tradition who so often figure as uncanny elements in the carnival spaces of circuses, horror film, vaudeville, etc. But I think that they are also in place to draw a comparison to the various expressions of gigantism in the novel, notably the Giant Adenoid, the Grigori the giant octopus, the novel itself, and of course *King Kong*.

King Kong is the most potently symbolic of these giant creatures (I will consider the giant Adenoid later). Kong has been treated more fully by Cowart (1980), Clerc (1983) and others, but I will gloss herein some of the implications of the creature as they are central to any understanding of the novel. The most obvious trace of the giant ape is in the epigraph to chapter 2: "You will have the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood," a joke that *KK* producer Merian C. Cooper made to Faye Wray on offering her the lead (179). So in this chapter we are to be introduced to the figure of the sacrificial monster, the unleashed horror, and the return-of-the-repressed, all echoed through the various roles of the Rocket and the rocket-men (Slothrop, Gottfried, Enzian) who are bound to it. Weisenberger links Kong to the V-2 missile's origins: the rockets were built in Peenemünde, "an island off the Usedom coast of northern Germany, long a pleasant resort on the Baltic Sea yet glimpsed from above… as a skull—or so the narrator remarks. On the fictional page this detail momentarily links both monstrosities, [King Kong] and rocket, in a web of narrative inferences" (Weisenberger 7). Cowart notes "the giant ape's essential nobility" and his "capacity for love" makes him sympathetic, and therefore links him to Frankenstein's creature as opposed to a more threatening and less "human" monster like the vegetable-creature from *The Thing* or the giant ants from *Them!* (Cowart 40). For Adorno, King

Kong is an image of the totalitarian state ("people prepare themselves for its terrors by familiarizing themselves with gigantic images"); Coates concludes that the horror film thus becomes the essential form of cinema, monstrous content manifesting itself in the monstrous form of the gigantic screen" (Coates 77) But *Gravity's Rainbow* casts Kong as both a figure of destruction, crashing through the countryside of Europe alongside the war, and as a feature of a humanity lost in that state-sponsored eradication, "the black scapeape we cast down like Lucifer" in an effort to establish new orders (Pynchon 275). Kong's allegorical fall from the Empire State Building may be caught up in a referential matrix of biblical allusion and Miltonian tragedy— But any relation to these Christian falls should be accepted as parody, or perhaps a kind of revisionism, for if Kong stands in for some Adam or Satan, than it is a pagan version of these figures: Kong is the object of ritual sacrifice, sexual sacrifice, idolatry, and animal violence. So Pynchon's deployment of Kong, the "gigantic black ape," (688) is deliberate in that he is an animal version of regenerative destruction, a great dark God not intended as a colonial nightmare of "primitive savages" but the animal origins of human civilization itself: the sacrifice here is of the violent urges of the animal/reptile mind for the altruism of society and cooperation.

Pynchon gets his joke in too about these film references, via the mock-academic "definitive 18-volume study of *King Kong*" by Mitchell Prettyplace: "it appears that Prettyplace has left nothing out, every shot including out-takes raked through for every last bit of symbolism, exhaustive biographies of everyone connected with the film, extras, grips, lab people…" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 275). The joke may have been precognitive as well: the exhaustive analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* minutia in concert with more "general" analysis of Pynchon via the journal *Pynchon Notes*, websites like the alarmingly populated Pynchon Wikis, and in books like Weisenberger's annotated *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* may come to be more of a parody of

scholarly criticism than Prettyplace's 18 volume study. Even in this parody of critical discourse, the way to assume a radical intervention in thought is in monstrosity (gigantism) and in the knowing admission that literature and its "work" would theretofore be filtered through a lens of spectacle and freakery. Movie monsters represent a radicalism in seeing and being that the atomic age requires insofar as "seeing" is now predicated on a reality that can be exploded at its most base level (the atom). Gigantic irrationality in the form of Kong (and in the satirical scholarship of Prettyplace) may prove a foil for sub-atomic exploitation. In another more sinister way, minutia is linked to explosive potential, and thus the fanatic attention to coincidental detail in *Gravity's Rainbow* alleges that the smallest detail might have the power to explode at a tremendous scale. Note, for instance, that the operative allegory of Walt Disney's book and film *Our Friend the Atom* (1957) is a towering genie capable of creation and destruction. The atomic monster thus combines issues of scale with issues over the eruptive potential of industrialized science.

"Fear not," he said. "You heard my vow. O Fisherman, my master, name thy three wishes. . . ."

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Fig. 5: Disney's atomic genie in *Our Friend the Atom,* 1957.

The Mummy's Curse

The atom explodes and combines, generates and decays. Monsters in *Gravity's Rainbow* resonate with the sense of both decay (physical as well as cultural — as in *decadence*) and with vitality, a kind of primal regenerative power. Their alignment with youth culture (via the drive-in "B" pictures which dramatize these monsters) positions monstrosity as pre-civilization or non-

irrational, outside of the forces of control (in this generative sense, *Gravity's Rainbow*'s

monsters can be allied with the creative and subversive powers of jazz, with the social

subversions and reversals in pulp fiction and horror comic books). In *Gravity's Rainbow*

monsters occupy the axis between the two poles of generation and degeneration; as we saw with

Tchitcherine, monstrous transformation can be a tremendous source of strength – or as with

Blicero, a sapping of human compassion and dignity, an inevitable descent from the old orders of

Europe.   So these monstrous figures are further complicated because of their cultural

significance – that is, of the cultures and culture clashes they signify. Pynchon well notes this

space they occupy between a community's sense of culture and their fear of otherness; history

and drama, creature-features and national myths: Pynchon deploys the monster as "an abjecting

epistemological device basic to the mechanics of *deviance construction* and *identity formation*."

(Cohen, *Monster Theory* ix).

The Pavlovian behavioralist Ned Pointsman makes an interesting and overt reference to

monster movies early in the novel. Pointsman has, up to this stage, been featured a bumbling or

comic character in pursuit of healthy dogs for his experiments in conditioning. He will come to

represent the forces which persecute Slothrop in the first half of the novel; his mantel will be

bestowed upon others, in later portions of the book, but in Parts I and II Pointsman personifies

"Them." To drive home this villainous role, he is later compared to Hitler and described as a

"megalo," [megalomaniac] (Pynchon 269, 272).[44] Pointsman has engineered a complicated trap

to catch Slothrop and better understand his relationship to the 'stimulus' of the V-2 rocket: he

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[44]   As a villain, Pointsman functions too as a foil to the idealistic young statistician Roger Mexico, who

will become a sort of heroic figure by the novel's end (while Pointsman goes on to disgrace); Pointsman

is the "Antimexico" (Pynchon 89).

and his agents have conditioned a giant octopus, Grigori ("horror movie devilfish") to attack the

agent Katje Borgesius by showing the octopus films of her; it is possible that by showing her the

films they have actually conditioned the creature to "desire" her (51). [45]   On the beach in France,

Grigori attacks Katje in the presence of Slothrop; once he comes to her rescue, Slothrop can then

be studied more closely by Pointsman's agents and be fed as much information about the rocket

as possible in the hopes that he can lead allied forces to additional rocket data, supply stores, etc

(the octopus is returned to the scientist via submarine). [46]   The plan is successful for a time.

Slothrop eventually catches on to this conspiracy and, having been intensely briefed on the

technical aspects of the rocket, he escapes into Zurich, postwar Europe and "The Zone" that is

Germany before the divide.

Having lost track of Slothrop, Pointsman has a nightmare, and it leads him to a new plan of

re-capturing the errant Lieutenant and castrating him. Slothrop has become obsessed with

Slothrop and horrified by Slothrop's precognitive sexual response to A-4 stimuli. He thinks to

himself "there can be no doubt that [Slothrop] is, physiologically, a monster. *We must never lose*

control. The thought of him lost in the world of men, after the war, fills me with a deep dread I

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[45]   Slothrop thinks to himself when he sees Grigori that "… it is the biggest fucking octopus Slothrop

has ever seen outside of the movies" (186). For our purposes, Grigori is a monster, a sea monster more

specifically, and the giant octopus Pynchon has in mind may have been something like the one in *It came*

From Beneath the Sea! (1955), though that would present an anachronism for Slothrop.

[46]   This is perhaps a veiled reference to another of Disney's atomic allegories, *20,000 Leagues Under*

the Sea (1954) which was tellingly released the same year as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and

Godzilla.

cannot extinguish…." (*Gravity's Rainbow* 144, emphasis in original).[47] Pointsman then fantasizes about Theseus and the Minotaur, and frets about his possession of a rare edition Pavlov's *Lectures on Conditioned Reflexes* vol 2 (referred to as "The Book"). Pointsman and six others share a copy of the book, and one by one five of the other seven have died: "Pumm in a jeep accident, Easterling taken early in a raid by Luftwaffe, Dromond by German artillery on Shellfire Corner, Lamplighter by a flying bomb, and now Kevin Spectro… auto, bomb, gun, V-1, and now V-2, and Pointsman has no sense but terror's" (Pynchon 139). He begins to wonder if the Slothrop failure may have something to do with his possession of The Book and the impending doom that its possession will bring him; catching hold of his increasing fear and paranoia, Pointsman mocks himself and says "Ah yes indeed. The mummy's curse, you idiot. Christ. Christ, I'm ready for D-Wing" (139).

"D-wing" is the psychiatric ward, and he fears his own descent into paranoia. This exclamation occurs in its own short paragraph, between two rather lengthier, internal reveries of Pointsman — and therefore draws significant attention to itself. The phrase "the mummy's curse" simply cannot be ignored. Weisenberger notes the "real" mummy's curse of the 1920s and 1930s ("Death Shall Come on Swift Wings To Him Who Disturbs the Peace of the King"), the one "activated" by Sir Howard Carter & co. upon the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb in

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[47]   Slothrop, because of his roles as the superhero Rocketman/Racketemensch (and mock-heroic *Plechazunga*/ "Pig-Hero"), is never "simply" a monster but instead hybridizes the monstrous function into one of sympathetic heroism and peaceful resolution – that is, as a monster, he is never "finally" confronted by his community to be reckoned or to victoriously destroy.

1922 and the twenty-some deaths attributed by the British tabloids to the curse of Tutankhamen

(Weisenberger 99).[48]

The bones of this story that became the impetus for any number of horror comics and horror

movies – notably amongst them Universal Studios's *The Curse of the Mummy* (1944), itself a

sequel to *The Mummy's Ghost* (tellingly, also 1944), which was a sequel to *The Mummy's Tomb*

(1942), which was preceded by *The Mummy's Hand* (1940) which is, depending upon whom you

consult, either a remake or a sequel to the "classic" Universal Studios walking-dead-Egyptian-

priest picture *The Mummy* (1932). Boris Karloff portrays the iconic ancient Egyptian priest

Imhotep in the 1932 original, the image of whom has come to be something of a classic movie

monster archetype exploited by the nostalgia machine of the "Universal Monsters" brand. British

horror-giants Hammer Film productions also had a string of similar pictures—*The Curse of the*

Mummy's Tomb (1964), *The Mummy's Shroud* (1966) and *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb*

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[48]   The inscription on Carter's headstone seems particularly pertinent to the ideas of transcendence and

transformation as explored in the pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*: "O night, spread thy wings over me as the

imperishable stars." For more see for instance T.G.H. James, *Howard Carter: The Path to Tutankhamun*.

(1971)—which further "varied" the archetype.

Fig. 6: Karloff as Ardeth Bay in The Mummy (1932)

What that archetype came to be was a more general trope common to both horror films and science fiction film: some ancient (or in science fiction "cosmic" or "alien") secret is discovered, unearthed, or otherwise molested by Western/modern agents seeking profit or forbidden knowledge (or knowledge to be put to ill use); this transgression awakens or activates some virulent, irrational, or brutal "evil" that erupts into the formerly ordered and rational cultural world of the transgressors. In the case of the mummy and its rampages, there are some obvious opportunities for anti- and post-colonial readings. This pattern is attended by its own

paranoid mantra, which the curse from *The Mummy's Hand* will illustrate nicely: "Who shall defile the temples of the ancient gods, cruel and violent death shall be his fate; never shall his soul find rest, unto eternity." Pointsman's invocation of this curse assumes a two-fold dimension: his possession of the book places him on some supernatural "list" of defilers who are doomed, like the group of individuals who participated directly or otherwise in the disturbance of Tutankhamen's tomb. However, the more useful implication is that Pointsman is cursed because he has violated some scientific taboo protecting, in some official state fashion or in some supernatural idea of natural order, "things man was not meant to know." Investigating knowledge that has been "forbidden" by some natural law will result in chaos and horrible death – victim of the monstrous V-2 rocket, perhaps, not unlike the victims strangled by the acrid and anciently preserved but nonetheless empty shell of the walking mummy itself, stalking slowly through the corridors, seemingly decrepit but physically unstoppable because it is outside of death as we know it.

Pointsman's utterance —"The mummy's curse you idiot" —has a decidedly cinematic-monstrous resonance, especially in the context of the other "classic" Universal monsters whose names have already been dropped by this stage of the novel. But Pointsman's dream sequence will integrate two more important elements into this monstrous fantasy, the Labyrinth/Minotaur story and another monster movie icon, the "mad scientist." In his fantasies after the nightmare, Pointsman admits that "once […], he did believe in a Minotaur waiting for him," and that he wished in his struggles for success to have a final, bloody struggle, "Minotaur blood the fucking beast, cries from far inside himself whose manliness and violence surprise him" (Pynchon 142). In the possibility of dying in this struggle, Pointsman imagines a "chamber turn a blood glow, orange, and then white and begin to slip, to flow like wax, what there is of the labyrinth

collapsing in rings outward, hero and horror, engineer and Ariadne consumed …the mad exploding of himself…" (143). [49]

No more potent figural antecedent of the horror associated with the "return of the repressed" exists than the Minotaur of antiquity, which has become a paradigmatic figure of literary and cinematic monstrosity. Poseidon became displeased after being deceived by King Minos: Poseidon had sent Minos a beautiful white bull from the sea in order to be sacrificed. Minos, wanting to keep the prized white bull, substituted another animal for the sacrifice. To repay this betrayal, Poseidon made Minos's wife, Pasiphäe, fall in love with the white bull. To satisfy her desires, she enlisted Daedalus to create a bull costume which she could wear to allow sexual congress with the animal. The result of this transgression was the Minotaur. Theseus, through a cunning developed by his lover Ariadne, killed the bull-man and returned to Athens.

The Minotaur in Greek myth functions as a figure of political allegory, symbolically barring Athens from emancipation of their tribute to Crete:

> A historical explanation of the myth refers to the time when Crete was the main political and cultural potency in the Mediterranean sea. As the fledgling Athens (and probably other continental Greek cities) was under tribute to Crete, it can be assumed that such tribute included young men and women for sacrifice. This ceremony was performed by a priest disguised with a bull head or mask, thus explaining the imagery of the Minotaur. It may also be that this priest was son to Minos. …Once continental Greece was free from

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[49] The novel's preoccupation with labyrinthine structures would naturally cause Ariadne's ruse— for Theseus to use a "clew" of thread to find his way back out of the maze—to appear as an allusion in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Of course it does (page 88) and establishes the Theseus myth as a foundational image-set for Pointsman's fantasies of power. See also Seed.

Crete's dominance, the myth of the Minotaur worked to distance the forming religious

consciousness from Minoan beliefs. ("Minotaur")

A physical, political oppression thus is challenged by Theseus's slaying of the Minotaur; Athens

erupts from bondage to the immoral Cretans. The creature paradigmatically functions as a bestial

representation of foreign cultures, in this case a Imperial power perceived as tyrannical and

therefore of monstrous proportions and origin. The Minotaur is an emblem of subjugation, a kind

of horrific political caricature. For Pointsman, the "politics" are those of the scientific

community, and the struggle one for his self-perceived fame and success as a researcher.

But the real threat the Minotaur poses is a sexual one. The Minotaur is after all a symbol of a

sexual transgression The beast is, after all, a "man-bull," and one can easily understand the

sexual allegories assumed by the image of a bull. The sort of possessive and territorial sexuality

of the bull would be obvious from animal husbandry, but folk tales of *toreros* of the *corrida de

toros* keeping bull penises as trophies speak to for the sexual power of the bull. Horned and

hoofed, the bull also echoes images of satyrs and, after the advent of sexuality, Satan. Thus the

minotaur can represent not only some terrifying foreign body but also the terror of one's own

body in a state of hyper sexuality, or aggressive sexual arousal. This base combination of

violence, sex, and bestiality makes the minotaur the natural opposition to civilization, as a

successful human culture is dependent upon the repression of these kinds of urges. The creepy,

asexual Pointsman fears this "fucking beast" as a reminder of his ineffectuality (Pynchon 142).

This creature marks a kind of early example of a "genetic" monster, a monstrous birth

resulting from taboo sexual relations (in this case bestiality). This literal monstrosity is coupled

with the symbolic value of the creature being a kind of cultural outsider or traitor: Pasiphäe

initially nurses the creature, but it eventually becomes violent and must be imprisoned in the

famous Minoan labyrinth. Pasiphäe's sexual transgressions result not only in an offspring not

only deformed but a danger to their political and social systems –one could say deformed and

therefore a danger to such systems. As the monster ate the flesh of humans, it enacted the most

central characteristic of the monster and a most central taboo for western culture: cannibalism.

So the monster in this case offers multiple boundary transgressions, complications, and

combinations: both man and animal, savage and citizen, royal and slave, the Minotaur not only

reflects back a horrific image of human sexuality and aggression but also stands as the resulting

figure of sexual transgression. He is identified with both the male as sexual aggressor (brutality,

bestiality) and archenemy (for Athenians, Crete; for Westerners and Christians, paganism and

Satan) and the female as the result of transgression.

"Hero and horror": Pointsman imagines himself as Theseus but too recognizes that the

Minotaur is, in some interpretive traditions, not separate from himself but the other-self he has to

destroy to enter into the community, the "inappropriate" instincts he has to suppress to accept his

role in the symbolic order of Civilization, the sexual / Oedipal urges he must conquer if he is to

fully become a subject. Pointsman hopes to escape his status as a "creep" and an outsider,

powerless in human social groups: " he's back to radiating that old creepiness again… and their

response to it is predictable, they run uttering screams only they, and he, can hear. Oh but how

he'd like someday to give them something *really to scream about*…." (Pynchon 141, emphasis

in original). This conflation is further complicated by his role as an *engineer*: in this fantasy,

Pointsman injects/ projects the scientist into the role of the hero Theseus (or synthesizes the role

of Theseus, the questor-hero, with that of Daedalus, the engineer-architect). This makes Slothrop

the Minotaur that Pointsman may be able to slaughter—that is, to rationalize, to quantify, to

stabilize; to "seek the answer at the interface[…] on the cortex of Lieutenant Slothrop" (139).

Given the villainy of Pointsman, his encroaching sense of persecution, and his mad plans for

Slothrop, the narrative thus casts Pointsman as a "Mad Scientist"; he describes Slothrop as his

Christmas miracle and "human baby… a survival, if you will, […] past death …" (168). The

'mad scientist' comparison is thus further elaborated in a scenario where Pointsman is

Frankenstein and Slothrop his unholy Creature born outside of natural conception and instead

reared by science (in this case, clinical psychology), a creature made out of the dead, a subject

stitched together of Pavlovian conditioning and therefore nothing more than a quilting of drives,

responses to stimuli, and mechanical responses.[50]

Movies like *The Mummy* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* invert the mad-scientist

role by aligning scientists with the forces of control (rather than the irrational monster-making of

the mad scientist). Nevertheless, they still manage to unleash monsters, though sometimes they

recapture them. The scientists are "mad" not because of their lust for knowledge but because of

their "blind" desire for scientific discovery and because of their responsibility to their corporate

funding – they are beholden to *profit*. *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Mummy* feature

dramatic conflicts wherein the various scientific parties responsible for unleashing ancient terrors

debate over the ethics and the true obligations and responsibilities of science and of some ideal

position of intellectual life known as "research." The bickering geologists in *Creature* constantly

remind the audience about their funding troubles, and how scientists have to find "tremendous

discoveries" if their important work is to continue; they similarly debate the practical, ethical,

and moral implications of killing the titular creature (the "gill-man") or of taking it "back" to

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[50]   Consider too that this makes Pointsman a "modern Prometheus,' further complicating the mythic

resonance of his fantasies of control and heroics.

civilization alive to be studied. Slothrop causes a similar debate amongst the forces that pursue

him: capture him to understand or destroy him to negate his power. In *The Mummy*, a nationalist

spin comes into this conversation when one of the British archaeologist complains about being

unable to bring the artifacts fro Ankh-es-en-amon's tomb to the British museum.

In one way, it funny to view these conversations as mere chatter to characterize the 2-

dimensioanl actors: in a Western, this sort of filler might instead be superficial discussions of

cattle, or of water, or of some other element necessary to the generic atmosphere; it's just

patter.[51] But in monster films the discussion takes on enough dramatic responsibility to identify

it as a true concern of the film, one integrated into the otherwise "base" pleasures of terror.

Disgust, suspense and titillation: what is the role of science in a world where it is beholden to

research dollars? Where do those research dollars come from? And what results are expected,

and why? If scientist are to stand in for the audience in these pictures – and they are, after all, our

human guides into the world of Darkness—then really what they're are discussing is the nature

of *work* in an information economy: that "academic freedom" or "important research" is

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[51]   See *Star Wars* here, where Luke Skywalker complains to his uncle about having to do chores around

their farm: he wants instead to "head out to Tashi Station to pick up some power converters." No

explanation is given of "Tashi station" or "power converters"; they are merely "science-fiction" sounding

things to say to indicate that 1. Luke lives in a world that is *unlike* ours ("power converter"?), 2. Luke

lives in a social world unlike his Uncle's, and 3. Luke lives in a world that *is like* the world of the

audience (teenagers exist in a separate matrix of desires and language use) but also *different* ("power

converters"?). Probably it's supposed to indicate some kind of hot-rodding gadget. But the patter is a

surface of the film that communicates structurally while having no actual content. The debate over

research funding in *Creature* and *Mummy* may provide the same structural content-less content.

definitively tainted by the need for it to be funded by some extra-academic source. It is the corrupting influence of research dollars that unleashes these monsters.

So in his brief but elaborate fantasy, Pointsman confuses/combines the "Orientalist" and horrific image of the Mummy and his curse (and the miasmic traces of exploitation, occupation, and other colonialisms that would accompany such an Orientalism) with the nationalist and psychosexual myth of Theseus and The Minotaur.[52] In this myth-mixing, Pointsman acts as Dr. Frankenstein, suturing myth (the politico-nationalist Creation narrative) with monster-pictures (the popular exorcism/revisiting of that humanity repressed by the impulse towards national identity) into a hybrid monster which returns to demonstrate to Pointsman the folly of total control and the dangers of "having a go" at Minotaurs.

The "ritual" of Horror film is a hazarding of the beast, a return to mastery over the repressed, follows a path similar to the labyrinth myth; just as the hero must enter the labyrinth to confront the monster and return to claim sovereignty over a *nation*, so too must the monster-movie audience enter into the narrative space of horror from which they emerge with mastery over themselves. So this monster/myth structure comes to accord with the other ritualistic structures and forms of the otherwise "formless monster with little, if any, organizing skeleton" which *Gravity's Rainbow* had once resembled. Monster movies are rituals of control wherein the audience goes forth into monstrous danger but emerges into the light on the other side: "…We watch the monstrous spectacle of horror film because we know that the cinema is a temporary place, that the jolting sensuousness of the celluloid images will be followed by reentry into the world of comfort and light" (Cohen *Monster Theory* 17). Bruce Kawin is also instructive in this

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[52]   On the Orientalism of the Mummy films, see Caroline T. Schroeder, "Ancient Egyptian Religion on the Silver Screen: Modern Anxieties about Race, Ethnicity, and Religion."

line of thought: "One goes to a horror film in order to have a nightmare—not simply a frightening dream, but a dream whose undercurrent of anxiety both presents and masks the desire to fulfill and be punished for conventionally or personally unacceptable impulses" (Kawin 680). As Pynchon uses the structures of the Kabbalistic journey to enlightenment, Teutonic myth, the symbols of the Tarot,[53] and the mandalic structure of the Christian calendar – so too do monster movies allow Pynchon to complicate, enliven, and "monstrify" his myth-making.

This re-entry "into the world of light" resembles both the rocket's fall on its parabolic trajectory and Pavlovian de-conditioning from stimuli, a return to the chaos of "this world" from the artificial controls of "Their world"; from outside to inside. So it is fitting again that Pointsman announces the player's roles in the drama in the "Mummy's Curse," as it is he who meditates on the poetry of Pavlov and the beauty and predictability of conditioned responses in animals like Grigori. We are reminded as well by Pointsman's fear of Slothrop's monstrosity that our *Raketemensch* was conditioned by Lazlo Jamf to be aroused by the new polymer Imipolex-G but *may not have been properly de-conditioned*, which would leave Slothrop on the "Outside," awaiting re-entry. He interstitial status may be the reason that both rockets and women are drawn to him, as well as the pilgrims who follow the pieces of the V-2 rocket and the 00000, the "scavengers now following industriously the fallback routes of V-2 batteries from the Hook of Holland all across Lower Saxony" (Pynchon 391). This may also be why Slothrop simply disappears at the end of the novel instead of being lead through some narrative closure: as a monster of the war, he is defined by that war's borders even as he miraculously zigzags across and through the various Allied structures of occupation. David Seed observes that Pynchon

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53   Weisenberger's summaries go a long way towards glossing the use of these traditions in *Gravity's Rainbow*; see also Hite, *Ideas of Order*.

"synchronizes the disintegration of Slothrop with a progressive dismantling of the novel's own images and themes," such that Slothrop's lack of narrative closure (i.e. lack of re-entry) mirrors the novel's seemingly "open" ending (Seed 157-58). As the political dreams of re-ordering unleashed at Potsdam rewrite the borders of Europe, Slothrop's boundaries are opened and he simply ceases to exist in the new order rather than dying in the traditional sense. He essentially "dispersed, dissolved, disintegrated, disassembled, disseminated, dissipated, or in some way or other disappears" (Lannark 54). Slothrop returns to the ether like the Egyptian priest Imhotep, who, upon hearing the heroes of *The Mummy* read an ancient spell, collapses into a pile of bones and dust. As Pynchon warned us in the beginning of the novel, "It has happened before" (3).

Movie Monsters embody the 'break' of modernism: the monster is both the boundary and the break; its cinematic associations emphasize the mass culture awakening and the technological shifts in media and social organization which modernism accompanied/inaugurated; the monster film's ritualistic journey into the land of the dead acknowledges the academic developments of anthropology and psychoanalysis, that sat bestride an aesthetic primitivism and interiority in the Modern imagination. Slothrop, becoming more aware of the complexity of his entrapment in a grand plot, escapes the Casino and finds his way to Zurich. There, he drifts to the Odeon café in Zurich:

> Lenin, Trotsky, James Joyce, Dr. Einstein all sat down at these tables. Whatever it was *they* all had in common […] perhaps it had to do with the people somehow, with pedestrian mortality, restless crisscrossing of needs or desperations in one fateful piece of street…, dialectics, matrices, archetypes all need to connect, once in while, back to some of that proletarian blood, to body odors and senseless screaming across a table, to

cheating and to last hopes, or else all is Dracularity, the West's ancient curse…"

(Pynchon 262-63)

So what *they* have in common is the "modern impulse" as it were, Lenin and Trotsky standing in for the investigative search beneath surface meanings towards a more elusive truth (and in this way also standing in for psychoanalysis);[54] James Joyce standing in for the artistic striving of the high moderns, both in the desire to render consciousness and in the self-exiled nature of their endeavor (and therefore too of the beginnings of a post-colonialism); and Dr. Einstein standing in for the tremendous progresses of science and technology, their destructive counterforce in the weapons of war (i.e. atomic energy), the splitting of perspectives towards a more relative morality (ala the Theory of Relativity). But note too the shift immediately from these hallmarks of the modern towards expressions of the abject: blood, body odor, irrational excess (screaming). He even slips in an oblique invocation of Dracula. In this passage Pynchon sutures the allegorical figures of Modernism into the trappings of horror and its mind/body preoccupations.[55]

Perhaps *Gravity's Rainbow* hybridizes cinematic monsters with the folkloric/mythical monsters and heroes as attempts to participate in the Modernist tradition of myth-making and

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[54]   Quoting Levi-Strauss: Marxism, Psychoanalysis and geology: " all three demonstrate that understanding consists in *reducing one type of reality to another; that the true reality is never obvious; and that the nature of truth is already indicated by the care it takes to remain elusive*" (in Hume 25, emphasis added)

[55]   We have previously seen this in Joyce himself, censored and banned for indulging in potty humor, and in Pynchon (throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, with its constant references to shit, its actual consumption by Brigadier Pudding , etc.) who was denied his Pulitzer for the prurient "indecency" of the book. For more on the mind/body/text preoccupation of the moderns, see Armstrong.

monumentalism without the "fascist" trappings that came to be associated with such monuments. *Gravity's Rainbow* revises and revives the monster-function to a more neutrally chaotic role, one that comes less to depend upon distinctions between good and evil (via Civilization and Its Others) but rather as a chaotic element in a world that has become otherwise overly rationalized. The monster is no longer "evil" but rather simply "unknown" or "free" in its freakery; not evil for exploding categories, howsoever dangerous; not dehumanized at the hands of industrialized science and culture but driven to laughter by its inconsistencies at it; not abominable for its disordered body but emblematic of some other order, to be respected, embraced, and perhaps even loved in the face of the machine-death that feeds the hungers of the Cartel Powers and the various state-sponsored death machines they have unleashed. *Gravity's Rainbow* in this sense aims at restoring a sense of wonder and mystery counter to the alienations and "estrangements" of the modernist impulse. This is not surrealism, which would seek to obscure the traumas of war (or the individual's neuroses) with fetish objects and phantasmagoria. As strange and dream-like the narrative world of *Gravity's Rainbow* becomes, it does not occlude or avoid traumatic knowledge with some convenient Magritte apple-in-front-of-the-face. Rather, *Gravity's Rainbow* attempt to re-connect to that knowledge via its occultism, its mythical/ritual narrative structure, and in its direct confrontations and interactions with monsters. The mythology of the Moderns was an abstract one, a monumental one ordained in the hope of restoring a system of meaning that could be removed from the human experience even as it sought to examine facets of that experience through various isolated sense- or formal experiments. The fascination with individual experience or perspective that accompanied *Ulysses*, *Dalloway*, Picasso's cubism *et cetera* severed that experience from a sense of the supernatural, which had previously lingered via the rhizomaticity yawps of this-or-that prewar Christian piety or convention. The gap

between individual sovereignty and mystical/supernatural experience had to be repaired while still avoiding the repressive, state-supporting submissions of the "old" church traditions as an expression of a national identity which had become obsolete in the face of modernism. It would be magic and the unknown or invisible arts that might instead bridge this gap, as investigated in *Gravity's Rainbow* through the various occult games (Tarot, Séance), traditions (Kabala, shamanistic vision quests) abilities (Prentice's telepathic fantasy-sharing, Slothrop's rocket-precognitions) and sacred beings—angels, witches, dwarves, wolf-men, and monsters. But that "mumbo-jumbo" would need to be rooted in a form less hostile to the forces of rationality and more accessible to street knowledge.

Monster movies offer an opportunity here because they, like most genre pictures, allow a kind of ritual wherein a sacred space can be entered and the "other side" – the Land of the Dead—can be safely engaged, explored, and then escaped inside the viewing space of the theatre. Films also have long been likened to dream-work and dream spaces, and most of these readings of the film experience can be useful if we take the comparison to dreaming as *only a comparison* (we have to be literal here about the word "figurative") and see that the dream-cinema model is really another iteration of the cinema-ritual model wherein "nostalgia for the Other side" can be re-enacted. In the post-atomic age, distinctions like that made between war and peace (or war/post-war) are made invalid by the international cartel system put in place by "Them." Pynchon offers monster movies as a nostalgic image of boundary-crossing (see Tololyan 59-60) as an attempt to re-imagine and thus reify the presence of boundaries to begin with.

One problem with this line of thought is that "The Movies" are not harmless fantasies but rather a multi-million dollar industry entangled with financial markets and various market

conglomerates and cabal-ized distribution systems. Motion pictures surely becomes part of the exploiting and world-devouring system of profit which is part of the cartel system – after all, the studio system and its vertical integration of the twenties and thirties would really be just another version of the international chemical/applied science giants who, according to the logic of *Gravity's Rainbow*, set the wars in motion in the first place (or at least set forth on a path wherein war was inevitable). Hence the movie theatre manager at the end of the novel becomes a stand-in for Richard Nixon. This may also help explain why Pynchon closes with a movie theatre being destroyed.

Kawin:

> The wish such a horror film fulfills is that of *seeing*, and the world view it confirms is 'that other side' [the spirit world]…the crucial issue is not the destruction of the seer, but the threat of victimization. … although the more common impulse in the horror film is to exorcise the demon and save the community (*Vampyr, Jaws, The Thing, Tarantula, The Blob, Frankenstein,* etc.), There is a parallel track in which the community is rightfully destroyed ... (Kawin in Braudy 685)

In his own creature-feature, Pynchon takes glee in the silence, just before impact, of a community that – having failed to heed the warnings and dangers—is not restored to order, but instead rightly devoured by the Beast.

PYNCHON VS. GODZILLA

> Every lesson we've learned has told us this: horrors in the world of science are part of nature's plan. --Dr. Tadokoro, *Gigantis, the Fire Monster* (1955).

Those of us hoping for Thomas Pynchon's long-promised novel about Mothra—a giant otherworldly caterpillar/moth who wreaks vengeance upon Japan when it transgresses against the native peoples of nearby Infant Island[56] –may have quite a wait in front of us. According to Bill Roeder, Pynchon mentioned it in 1978 and wrote about it at some point to his then editor, Cork Smith (Roeder 7). Pynchon also warned his then-editor Cork Smith of a work featuring a creature that would come from "under the ice"; this was some thirty years before the giant "serpentoid" figure actually awakened from its frozen slumber to terrorize arctic explorers in *Against the Day* (2006). So it may be a while before we finally read Pynchon's giant-monster-movie-novel.

As per usual, this could be exaggeration, speculation, or possibly a practical joke on the part of the author. Pynchon may instead have substituted the creature Mothra with similar giant monster who appears (however tangentially) in *Vineland* as either Godzilla or the world's most elaborate insurance fraud: a seaside lab of the shadowy Chipco corporation is destroyed in the night by what appears to be a dinosaur –like creature, leaving behind only a "gigantic animal footprint" (Pynchon 1990, 142). Pynchon's novels offer a kind of monster-mash, so Mothra and/or Godzilla seem almost fated to appear in his bestiary. As we saw in the former chapter, *Gravity's Rainbow* makes consistent reference to the "Golden Age" monster movies of the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. films like *White Zombie* and *Frankenstein*); *King Kong*, as a film-text and as a monstrous figure, persistently occupies the novel's imaginative framework. *Vineland* too deploys both horror film referents (*Friday the 13th*) and otherworldly beings (like the *woges*, Yurok spirit people who lead Brock across the river of death to the underworld) as monstrous agents. *Against*

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[56]   …or if not "about" Mothra but perhaps "inspired by Pynchon's passion for Mothra and other Japanese horror movies" (Roeder 7).

the Day features constant encounters with creatures *not entirely human,* e.g. the subterranean creatures of various indigenous folklore-systems (German *Tatzelwürm,* Mexican *Duendes*), archaeological representations of quetzlcoatl-ian indigenous Americans with lizard and bird features, the time-traveling vampires, and the aforementioned giant, serpentoid "Figure" who destroys the unidentified northern city. *Inherent Vice* mentions the King of all Monsters, albeit briefly, within the first ten pages.

Mothra, Godzilla and the Figure from *Against the Day* share a more specific generic bond: they are *dai kaiju* — Japanese "giant monsters" (more literally, "strange beasts"), often referred to in the States simply as *kaiju* and featured prominently in the post WWII film tradition known as *kaiju eiga* ("monster movie[s]"). Pynchon incorporates the *kaiju eiga* tradition in his novels to a variety of effects, unleashing their monstrous energies as multivariable figures of allegory, allusion, and associative opportunity. The inclusion of Japanese kaiju in Pynchon's novels is consistent with his monstrous menagerie and as well as with his depiction of other unordered, subversive, or marginal bodies. Theses kaiju are science-fictional bodies as well, as many of these kaiju eiga straddle that productive generic fault-line between the eruptive monstrosity of horror-film and the bounded, rationalist anxieties of science fiction. Moreover, kaiju can be said to represent a distinct deviation from the American tradition of monster pictures, ascribing to them a doubly "other" existence as not only monsters but the monsters of a culture of others. Of course, the cultural differences between Japanese and American monsters may not always be visible or obvious to western audiences, who often see versions of the films that have been overdubbed, re-edited, and of course filtered through American cultural lenses. The inability for American audiences to then "see" the Japanese versions of these films creates an intensified, exponential "unknowability" to these creatures, making them a particularly monstrous monster.

This magnified "namelessness" may be one of the reasons kaiju are so often played for camp or slapstick value in American films, television programs et cetera. As such figures like Godzilla become transnational entities, integrated into both the cinematic traditions or identities of both the American and the Japanese systems.

These figures appear wrapped in a post-atomic discourse, as the seminal kaiju film *Gojira* is unmistakably motivated by the post-atomic trauma of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. So in their inexplicability, slapstick violence, and supernatural motivation for revenge, kaiju appear to be perfect tools for Pynchon's program of ironic subversion. By isolating and examining the presence of kaiju (and other giant monsters) in *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland*, and *Against the Day* (and by differentiating if possible the differing significance between these giant creatures and their less post-modern counterparts), I hope to identify how that program has dialectically developed along the lines of contemporary warfare and in Pynchon's seemingly waning sympathies for the counter-culture utopias of the 1950s and 1960s. As we will see through an examination of three of his novels, Pynchon's work benefits from the tensions resulting from these different readings of kaiju film, as they allow for a more resonant image in works that very often deal with attempts at state ideological and industrial erasure of regional and local difference.

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The kaiju film is a Japanese expression of the tradition of horror and monster films that became increasingly popular in the 1930s and which through its various iterations came to the 1950s as a craze for giant monsters. Godzilla will always be the most well-known kaiju figure in the US, but Japanese audiences will readily recognize characters like Rodan, a super-sonic pteranadon creature (known in Japan as *Radon*); Gamera, a giant turtle with turbo-jets for legs;

Mothra, a giant space-moth; and the three-headed dragon Ghidorah (AKA *Three-Headed Monster*, *Astro-Monster*, or *Monster Zero*). Godzilla arrived on the scene in the wake of a successful theatrical re-release of King Kong in 1952 and Warner Brothers' successful 1953 *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. According to David Kalat's *A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series*, RKO's 1952 reissue of King Kong was a massive success, earning $3 million at the box office; *Time* magazine called Kong "Monster of the Year" (20). Kalat's book is the single most useful tool for any detailed study of these films. The first film to feature a giant monster motivated or created by "atomic testing" (or some variation thereof), *20,000 Fathoms* inspired a wave of post-atomic monsters like *Them! The Giant Ants* (1954) and of course the Japanese blockbuster *Gojira* (1954), released in America as *Godzilla, King of Monsters* (1956). As the popular history tells it, producer Tomoyuki Tanaka had been inspired by the effects of *Kong* and *20,000 Fathoms*, but lacked the time or budget for stop-motion photography. He settled for a man in a latex dinosaur suit.[57]

(Some clarification of terms is hereby necessary: "Godzilla" is the Americanized version of the Japanese word *Gojira*, a portmanteau meaning something like "gorilla-whale," and in this essay refers to the giant monster itself. "*Gojira*" refers to the 1954 Japanese Toho film; "*Godzilla King of Monsters*" refers to the 1956 American remake/release featuring Raymond Burr.)

While *Gojira* and the other Toho kaiju films were inspired initially by American "creature-features," they nevertheless departed from the American tradition is subtle ways. Foremost,

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[57]   Godzilla, of course, is no simple "dinosaur," but instead a mutation of some pre-historic creature into a new and contemporary "thing" or being. Godzilla is therefore both ancient and modern, pre-historic and technological inscribed, and in that way could loosely or irresponsibly be said to be particularly "Japanese."

while American monster movies were marginalized as "B" pictures, Toho's early *Godzilla* pictures were often produced with distinguished, recognizable actors, substantial budgets, and artistic gravity; Ishirō Honda, the director of these early efforts, was frequent second-unit for Akira Kurosawa. So there is a disconnect between the Saturday matinee-reception of Godzilla by American audiences and the more celebrated pedigree of its cast and crew in a more specifically Japanese context. These creatures are also removed from the "gothic" and "romantic" ichor which is usually dripping from American pictures like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* – and the psycho-sexual anxieties which such a tradition suggests become instead a drama over identity and self-control.

By the end of 1950s, the American monster-movie tradition would eventually aggregate into a ritual of reason, with some scientific or military transgression against scientific ethics producing a monster that would be destroyed in the name of social order. Countless American versions of the "man in a rubber suit" featured monsters who, according to the most common interpretations, were preoccupied with sexualized deviance, repression, and monstrosity: *Robot Monster* (1953), *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954)*, This Island Earth* (1955), *The Beach Girls and the Monster* (1965). Howsoever their monstrous bodies may have been motivated by science, their depiction typically inspire a psycho-sexual reading. As Philip Brophy points out, American monster movies use the rubber suit to depict human-scale monsters that explore the "expanded tactile self", e.g. the gill-man from *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (dir. Jack Arnold, 1954); these creatures "foreground their plasticity in the form of sexual grotesqueries… in key dramatic scenes, the costumed form of these monsters comes into heaving and salivating proximity of the normalized human body, suggesting acts of sex more than death" (Brophy 41). The gill-man from *Black Lagoon* is aroused into the human sphere when scientists violate the ancient

Amazonian Black lagoon, bringing along with them the beautiful Kay Lawrence (Julia Adams).
The gill-man watches her swim, follows her onto the ship, and his heaving desire for Kay leads
to a prolonged pursuit and abduction.

Fig. 7. "suggesting acts of sex more than death"

The enduring image of the creature graces one of the theater posters for the film: Kay, in her
bathing suit, is carried by the creature into his "secret underground lair," ostensibly to be
ravished.

He is of course interrupted by rescue and gunfire. The prospect of aberrant sex committed by
these men-in-rubber-suits is an essential charm of the western creature-feature tradition.

Japanese kaiju film approached monstrosity in context-specific terms notably different than the American psycho/sexual trajectory. Unlike the gill-man, Godzilla rises from the depths not to titillate with the suggestion of bestiality or to tap into the latent sexual energy and anxiety of the assumed viewer. As Kalat puts it, "With Gojira, Honda saw an opportunity to make radiation visible." (Kalat 15). Godzilla embodies energy *per se*, both the destructive power of atomic energy and the catastrophic natural energies of the natural world which has always loomed over Japan: earthquakes, tsunami, typhoon. Rather than sexual horror or menace, Godzilla embodied instead larger-scale natural destruction and physical and social apocalypse. Kaiju generally (and Godzilla certainly) almost insist on being read as dramatizations of post-atomic trauma, and the post-war Japanese anxiety over rapid changes in industry, culture, and social forms. As victims of an atomic bombing, the Japanese therefore experience apocalypse not as some abstract doom but rather as the physical remainders of a local and specific physical assault, a near total destruction of their collective sense of identity. Susan Napier notes this difference in Japanese science fiction stories, noting their sense of "disaster" and "social, material, and sometimes spiritual collapse" as opposed to western science fictional tendencies toward optimism, expansion of the self, or frontier myths of (re)settlement and culture-building (Napier 329).

The perversion hidden within the rubber suit of Godzilla, then, could be reconfigured into a perverse pleasure gained from willfully unleashing apocalyptic energy, of unleashing energy without control – or of watching an otherwise controlled world be smashed, shocked, and stomped by just such an eruption. *Kaiju eiga* is more about monstrous energy than it is about the "monstrous-ising of sexuality" (Brophy 41). King Kong is an exotic adventure-romp with a sacrificial virgin always in danger of being defiled, while Godzilla, with its depictions of irradiated victims, its "Oxygen Destroyer" super-weapon, and its overt meditation on human

extinction, is really an apocalyptic doomsday scenario, a "horror movie about the end of the world." (Kalat 18). If Kong or the gill-man is a "noble savage" (or frustrated suitor), Godzilla can better be understood as a victim or war – specifically, atomic war and radiation sickness. Honda once spoke of his inspiration for *Gojira* in the specific context of post-war Japan: "At the time, I think there was an ability to grasp 'a thing of absolute terror,' as Shigeru Kayama himself called it. …when I returned from the war and passed through Hiroshima there was a heavy atmosphere—a fear that the Earth was already coming to an end. That became my basis" (Kalat 15).

(An important distinction to make here too is that Kong is "racialized" in a way that Godzilla is not – at least to American audiences. Both originate in islands where remnants of indigenous cultures create an atmosphere of "primitivism" against which the intruding scientist can be said to represent modernity. In that the residents of the island where Godzilla is discovered are associated with folklore and pre-modernity, they can be said to have been functionally racialized in the same way that the "savages" of Skull Island in Kong are, though with a touch more subtlety. And in this aspect there remains the most brief glimmer of aberrant sexuality in that one of the elderly residents of the island tell the reporters that they used to sacrifice a young girl to Godzilla "in the old days." Compared to the display of the bound, writhing body of Faye Ray on Skull Island, however, the Japanese islander's reminiscence becomes a hint of a hint, a suggestion of a suggestion.)

A second way that kaiju film in general (and Godzilla specifically) diverge from the American creature-film mode can be found in the depiction of *otherness* and in the approach to the "containment" of the monster's aberrance. Chon Noriega's influential reading of the American reception of the Godzilla films maintains that "Western thought keeps the Other

externalized and separate as a way of defining the Self by contrast… Japanese thought seeks to maintain both Self and Other within the culture by immersing the Self in the Other" (Noriega 68). Godzilla is incorporated into the sense of self of the characters in the film – that is, Godzilla does not erupt from "outside" but rather is received as a part of the culture, a force that must be a part of the natural world in which Japan exists. American monsters are to be corralled and destroyed; Godzilla, on the other hand, is to be understood not thorough a process of obliteration or rationalization but through empathy and pity. Audiences identify with Godzilla, helped along by the fact that he is obviously and unmistakably a man-in-a-suit.   The special effect strategies of the Toho kaiju films (the man in the monster suit, rather than an animatronic or stop-motion animated creature controlled by off-camera forces) as well as the toy-like models of buildings and military vehicles further display this desire to integrate the monster rather than contain or control it; Brophy explains the audience's pleasure in this different approach as "the sensation of being disoriented by overt fakery instead of overcome by verisimilitude" (Brophy 39). According to Noriega's logic, it is the knowledge of the man in the suit that allows for the monster to exist at all, and thus the "overt fakery" of the Godzilla costume becomes an allegory for the desire to see the self in the Other. In Frankenstein (or the wolfman), we see the monster in ourselves; in Godzilla, we see ourselves in monsters. This creates a fissure in the monster/human dichotomy wherein other states of being can be imagined – and also where the destructive powers of science are seen to be little more than prosthetic attachments of the human condition. If Godzilla is the atomic bomb, than the bomb is really just a man in a suit.

At the collision of these two symbolic registers (psycho-sexual menace vs. apocalyptic erasure/synthesis) and film traditions (American drive-in movies, Japanese *kaiju eiga*) readers can locate in Pynchon's novels another man-in a rubber-suit: the *Schwarzgerät*, the .00000

rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* which relies on a human agent clad in Imipolex-G to complete its guidance mechanisms; submissive acolyte Gottfried dressed in his final sado-masochistic role-play as he descends within the rocket toward the movie theatre audience waiting below. So in a novel pre-occupied with issues of "synthesis and control," giant monsters are made to synthesize formerly incommensurable identities (Japanese, American) in their complete eradication of rational human control – that is, in their destruction of so many miniature urban replicas, stomping, heaving, erupting in tremendous arcs of heat, nuclear power, cocoon-webbing, and generally explosive energy.

Kaiju and Gravity's Rainbow

As I have demonstrated in my previous chapter, monsters and giant creatures run amuck through the pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*, though functioning more firmly in a Western movie-monster tradition (see my plot summary for *Gravity's Rainbow* therein). They nonetheless can indicate a point on Pynchon's kaiju-trajectory. As Terry Caesar notes, Dr. Pointsman dreams of the Minotaur in the first quarter of the novel, and Seaman Pig Bodine is compared to the Abominable Snowman; the novel otherwise makes constant use of the words *Thing*, *Creature, Presence, Beast* (Caesar 158, 167). I more specifically thinking here of two more visible episodes or tropes from the novel: the persistent references to King Kong (e.g. "the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood") and the "giant adenoid" episode early in the novel. Kong as-a-monstrous-body does not actually "appear" or take shape in the novel. Rather, he exists as an allusive matrix, a source of allegorical reference in Pynchon's particular myth-system, an allusions to an allusion: "Critics have seen in Kong everything from the black race to the

repressed libido—not to mention mythic figures as diverse as Christ and Lucifer," notes Cowart;

he as well "embodies all the irrational fears of monstrous black appetites" and can "illuminate

…racial concerns" as well as embody "repressed sexuality" (Cowart 40, 43, 45). Kong furthers

the characterization strategies of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "a figure whose essentially secular passion

[religious sacrifice] would define and give resonance to the enigmatic fate of Slothrop, Enzian,

and Gottfried" (Cowart 48). Kong haunts the book, as it were, but remains in his physical

absence a point of comparison and as source of only potential power. This does not erase

however Kong's inarguably gigantic antics from our immediate concern, nor does it negate the

fact that he was at his most literal a giant ape who fought dinosaurs and rampages through New

York City—and directly inspired Tanaka to produce *Gojira*.

Another sequence here can be productive: Pirate Prentice, given to realizing/witnessing/

participating in others' fantasies, encounters the embodiment of Lord Blatherard Osmo's

nightmares, a giant adenoid who comes to threaten London. "Out of the fog materialized a giant,

organlike form…. leaving behind some slime brightness of street-wake that could not have been

from fog. ... *It was a giant adenoid*. At least as big as St. Paul's, and growing every hour by hour.

London, perhaps all England, was in moral peril!" (Pynchon, Gravity's *Rainbow* 14). Thomas

Clerc observes some of the more obvious American cinema antecedents to the Adenoid: "As the

adenoid grows and grows in its unstoppable rampage in London, we recollect its screen cousins:

the Thing, the Blob, the Devouring Slime, the Mutant Amoeba – all those rampant creatures that

glutted their way through all those science fiction horror fantasies" (Clerc 111-112). Note the

Adenoid's "organlike" formlessness, producing horror through its display of the abject. Horror

film naturally deploys the abject as the source of its power, in the consistent visualization of

blood, viscera, vomit, and other horrific "fluids" as well as the presence of the ultimate abject,

the corpse, and oozing behemoths like the Blob animate this concept as a willful agent of destruction and defilement.[58] The fact that the adenoid puts London in *moral* peril (rather than *bodily* peril) further suggests that this creature is operating in the typical American creature fashion: an eruptive "return of the repressed" that threatens social/moral order, a repulsive physical reminder of a *social* boundary/moral taboo.

The Adenoid most closely resembles *Gojira* and other dai kaiju in the description of the Army's response to the monster's rampage. The sequence revels in the *kaiju eiga* cliché of army vehicles massing in response to the monster, prolonged visions of toy jeeps and remote-controlled tanks, shot in slow motion to add an illusion of mass. Pynchon dramatizes the particularly Cold-War conflation of moral jeopardy and the dissolution of personal identity, the anti-communist (and later, in the 1980s anti-Japanese) anxiety over being absorbed into an unidentified mass:

> Teams come down from the Cavendish Laboratory, to string the Heath with huge magnets, electric arc terminals, black iron control panels full of gauges and cranks, the Army shows up in full battle gear with bombs full of the latest deadly gas—the Adenoid is blasted, electric-shocked, poisoned, changes color and shape here and there … before the flash-powder cameras of the Press, a hideous green pseudopod crawls toward the cordon of troops and suddenly *sshlop!* wipes out an entire observation post with a deluge of some disgusting orange mucus in which the unfortunate men are *digested* ….
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> (Pynchon *Gravity's Rainbow* 15)

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[58]   Elaborated in full in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film.*

The more we learn about the Adenoid's physical shape, the more it comes to resemble a popular kaiju villain, *Hedorah,* from the 1971 film *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (released in the States in 1972 as *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*). Like the Adenoid, Hedorah is a shape-shifting blob who spews a kind of sludge at his opponents. In the history of these motion pictures, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* is a kind of turning point in Godzilla, marking for most fans the decline of the series.

Fig 8. Hedorah the Smog Monster

One point of contention is the film's "anything goes" approach; according to Kalat, the film "bounces around between dream sequences, musical numbers, animated cartoons, drug-induced hallucinations, abstract symbolic imagery, a black-and-white sequence, dancing skeletons, distorted monster-eye viewpoints, and a series of television-like images…" (Kalat 113). It is hard to disregard the similarities shared by this description of *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* and the strangely corresponding narrative antics of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Hedorah then becomes interpretively productive not as a source of inspiration for *Gravity's Rainbow* (though the chronology may allow such a coincidence; the first trade edition of *Gravity's Rainbow* appeared in 1973), but in recognizing that in the form of the Adenoid, Pynchon delivers a giant monster embodying two traditions of monster film and the concomitant associations of both: in the American creature-film tradition, the Adenoid synthesizes unleashed libidinal or psycho/sexual chaos with anxieties over the expansion of military industry over science and magic—an apocalyptic warning of the coming of the A-bomb echoed later in the novel as the destroying angel whose penis is mistaken for a mushroom cloud); in the mode of the Japanese giant-monster, the Adenoid dramatizes the horror of Atomic power, the trauma of a post-apocalyptic culture and the anxieties over the industrial, economic, and cultural identity shifts that culture rapidly came to address after the war. The adenoid and Hedorah (or Godzilla, for that matter) differ in an important way: the Adenoid after all only exists in Osmo and Prentice's imaginations, while Godzilla and Hedorah actually destroy large portions of Osaka. At no point in *Gravity's Rainbow* are the Adenoid or Kong treated as actual agents, and the two resonate only in waves of allegorical significance. By the time *Gravity's Rainbow* shifts to its third destroying giant, the Angel of Lübeck, Pynchon has modulated away from the playful romps of *The Blob* and *Godzilla Vs. the Smog Monster* to a more sober and cosmic vision of Beings and Powers greater than human, supernatural harbingers of doom outside of human comprehension. He will elaborate this vision with his kaiju battles in *Vineland* and *Against the Day*.

GOJIRA and *Vineland*

Vineland, released in 1990, takes place in the northern California of 1984, where Summer-of-love exiles like the fading bass player Zoyd Wheeler have taken refuge against the occupational forces of the Reagan administration at the dawn of the "war on drugs." Zoyd, who fakes a mental disability in order to collect a government pension check, is visited by characters from his past who are searching for his estranged wife Frenesi Gates. Zoyd, his daughter Prairie, a biker "ninjette" named DL, and a karma-adjuster named Takeshi Fumimoto end up tangled and re-tangled in a government sponsored search for Frenesi who is revealed to have not only been a government "snitch" on peace movement protestors in the 1960s, but who also turns out to have been implicated in the murder of a movement leader. Whereas *Gravity's Rainbow* reveled in the popular culture of World War II, Vineland is entrenched in the 1980s, and contains numerous references to television shows and blockbuster films. While some critics were disappointed in this approach, it is thematically consistent with gravity's Rainbow in that it uses vernacular language and a pop-culture "ecosystem" from the near past to explore the technologization of culture and the eradication of utopian possibility and disorder by an increasingly militarized and intrusive government. It balances this pedantry with slapstick, bad puns, low-culture generic appropriation (e.g. ninja novels and bad science fiction) and the deployment of alternative systems of order. It contrasts the punk –rock nihilism of the 1980s counter-culture movement with the "peace and love" psychedalia of the sixties revolutionaries – as well as the earnest and valiant efforts of the Industrial Workers of the World and other labor activists of the thirties and forties. *Vineland* then, manages to argue both that "the fascists have won" and to imply that the revolutionary spirit that opposes that fascism will somehow regenerate and be reborn.

The kaiju in *Vineland* take on a more distinctly Japanese appearance than they do in *Gravity's Rainbow*, at least superficially, in that Hollywood monsters like Kong are displaced in favor of a

more insidious, humanoid, and domestic monster in the form of the slasher (and deployed in a variety of references to the horror-video boom of the 1980s – see the following chapter on Ellis). The narrator does not physically display the creature in the novel, or have it appear to any witnesses. Physical evidence of this giant monster brings Takeshi Fumimoto, and insurance claims investigator, to a scene of devastation: an unidentified force ("clearly reptilian") destroys the Chipco research complex on the coast of Japan (Pynchon *Vineland* 143). After having taken out a large insurance policy against the possible destruction by any form of animal life, one of Chipco's research facilities on the coast has been "mysteriously obliterated," leaving no trace except for a giant foot-shaped crater: "The demolished complex was located on a lightly traveled piece of coastline, and Chipco could certainly argue that something had come up out of the surf, put one foot in the sand for leverage, and stomped on the lab with the other. Since it had happened at low tide, any second print on the beach would have got washed away when the tide came back in" (Pynchon *Vineland* 142-143). Consider the word "stomp" therein a kind of signal word for Godzilla fandom (one of the more popular Godzilla fanzines is called *Stomp Tokyo*) and of course for the sort of cliché associations that the average viewer/reader would have with such a combination of images. Takeshi and the other investigators, while speculating that the incident may be a hoax, nevertheless accept the possibility and reality of the giant creature as part and parcel of their natural world. So one important distinction to make here between *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland* is that the kaiju in the latter is at last passably "real" or tangible, whereas those in the former exist only as allegory and fantasy.

This commixture of possibilities (symbolic and literal, supernatural and military/industrial) is one element of the novel's performance of collapsing boundaries between filmic/televised experience and the individual experience. As Ernest Mathijs argues, most of the book produces a

frame of reference almost totally mediated by film and television (Mathijs 66-67). For instance

consider FDA field agent Hector Zuñiga's desire to become "the Popeye Doyle of the Eighties...

Not just the movie, but *Hector II,* then the network series" (Pynchon 1990: 338). So while the

physical presence of the monster Godzilla is suggested and probable, the cumulative confusions

of the novel like those of Hector over his image (or Prairie Wheeler's confusion over her

relationship with her mother Frenesi, or Zoyd's paranoid vision of persecution and surveillance

versus his decreasing importance in the plot, etc) hoist a more troubling "unmapability" over the

creature's presence in the novel.

The dispute over the creature's reality is partially paranoia, but also partially due to the

shifting nature of the evidence: "Looking through the dark morning drizzle, Takeshi couldn't

even see over to the other side of the foot shaped crater. From up here on the rim, about all he

could make out were the yellow headlamps of the tech squads moving far below, taking samples

of everything, every last splinter, for testing. Here and there edges of the footprints had begun to

slide in" (Pynchon 1990: 142). The trace of the monster, as it were, is vanishing, and it therefore

cannot occupy any consistent meaning. It cannot be contained by human perception and

experience, especially the rigidly technical reference in which its presence is being investigated.

The only power remaining to the monster is anecdotal, implicit, and one to be analyzed only in

fragmentary and partial glimpses (reduced to splinters for testing). In another sense, though, this

creature cannot be contained, and can only be rationally interpreted in glimpse (e.g. the shining

headlamps). The eruption of this giant-monster onto the scene thus maintains the shifting

significance of the monster and represents a sort of utopian site of resistance against the

archiving and controlling forces of corporate/global capitalism. This kaiju, then, can act as a kind

of hero-figure or totem for the utopian counter-culture survivors in Pynchon's northern

California, a monster-god as available to its devotees as a retributive force like Godzilla. As the helicopters, undercover agents and DEA forces further infiltrate Vineland, its utopian promise begins to crumble. In the plot, of course, this is made more visible through the collusion of allegedly counter-culture forces with representatives of law-enforcement—the various snitches and stooges ranging from the small-timers who collected "Purchase-of-Information" dispersals from undercover federal agents like Hector Zuniga to Zoyd's ex-wife Frenesi Gates, a major collaborator who eventually went into hiding on the federal witness protection program. Her infidelity to Zoyd.is part of a pattern of exponentially increasing betrayals, e.g. the infiltration of of the film collective 24fps, the conspiracy in the murder of Weed Atman, and the fall of the popular resitance movement the "People's Republic of Rock and Roll."

  "Snitching" for either profit or protection ensures that the counter-culture opportunities of the American west coast are always self-defeating. Humans and human nature cannot save utopia in Vineland, but the desire for utopia can perhaps be sustained via the looming threat of supernatural retribution from avenging angels and monsters. *Godzilla* (1956) is at its heart a survivor's account, the testimony of witness to apocalyptic destruction, but this is also the testimony of a glimpse into the unknown, of what Lovecraft would have called "the unknowable".[59] Witnessing a divine/supernatural agent of apocalypse also entails a sense of

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[59]   The unnamable presence of the Beast, the Thing, the Presence, "agents not entirely human" etc in Pynchon's novels inevitably point back to the work of Lovecraft, who relied on indescribable encounters with unknown supernatural /alien forces for most of his affect. The two writers share other affinities appropriate to some other essay, but in *Godzilla King of Monsters* one could see journalist Steve Martin's (Raymond Burr) trip to Tokyo & the Sea of Japan as not unlike Lovecraft's unnamed narrator's experience with ancient creatures in his novel *In the Mouth of Madness*.

prophecy, of a holy "vision" that can be related to various strains of mysticism, vision-questing and therefore can be linked to the psychedalia of the American 1960s and the strain of Orientalism/Eastern appropriations that that the popular counter-culture of that time consumed: transcendental meditation, and other Vedic trappings like the sitar from the long-hairs, Buddhist posturing like the valorization of non-attachment in the Beats of the 50's (a group with which Pynchon is often yoked).

For the most part, these world-views (or any attendant iterations of this-or-that West Coast baby-boomer freakery) could not integrate or endorse violence and violent retribution, barring perhaps the flirtations with Black Panther-style Afro-centric militancy that may have beckoned on the campus fronts of the early culture wars. So the suggested presence of Godzilla in *Vineland* allows the novel a prophetic vision of destruction of the military industrial complex (after all, Chipco is the "-industrial" part of that construction). Godzilla can stand-in for a wish for the annihilation of that state apparatus for the hippies who do not have it in their imaginative spectrum top wish violent death upon their adversaries. Jameson articulates one common strategy for overcoming the difficulty in imagining radical difference: conjuring an alien body or "other science fictions" on which to project the execution of that difference. One must posit a radical destruction of the old order to be able to imagine a new one because "as someone has observed, it's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson 2006, 199). So Godzilla can be the radical alien Other for which the hippies can be allowed to imagine an end of the military industrial complex through violent means, means heretofore excluded from or in opposition to their ideological grammar. Godzilla operates outside of the idealized non-violent/pacifist ideology of the ex-sixties drug scene – in fact, it is considered a kind of force of nature, a local expression of the natural forces of the ocean. Even

though the army "wins" at the end of *Godzilla*, they can never ever truly defeat the monster – as evidenced by the ritual rebirth of the Thing through film sequels the list of which reads like a biblical genealogy: *Godzilla* (1954), *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956), *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955), *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), *Mothra vs. Godzilla* (1964), *Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster* (1964), *Invasion of Astro-Monster* (1965), *Godzilla vs. the Sea Monster* (1966), *Son of Godzilla* (1967), *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), *All Monsters Attack* (1969), *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (1971), *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972), *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973), *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974), *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975), *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989).

Monsters always come back, and the ritual return of the repressed spawns sequels, copycats, and entire genres. Pynchon's love of genre-fiction and genre-icons could really be just another facet of his mysticism, of the structures of ritual and myth at work in his novels, but in the case of *Vineland* the transnational character of the *kaiju* film elaborates not only a desire for the supernatural but a desire for the empowering violence of supernatural agency, a identification with *Kali* the destroyer. Toho's stable of kaiju, after the success of Godzilla, become less and less likely to be mysterious and malignant creatures and instead become more like avenging monster-gods, spirits to be called upon for aid if possible. Mothra, who rages against Tokyo to rescue twin fairy-princess stolen by Japanese mainlanders to be exploited for profit, is a prime example. The notion of "cooperative spirits" may be of Shinto tradition (Kalat 64). Toho studio monsters come to be seen not only as spirits and deities who can intercede in the world but also super-weapons to be directed at those who offend the natural order – as opposed to those violate the social or symbolic order of taboo and social propriety.

The Man-Shaped Light: *Against the Day*

A common observation or complaint about *Against the Day* is that the novel is plotless, or rather 'lacks meaning" – which may have been easier to accept if it also did not clock in at 1000-something pages.[60] Rather the novel continues Pynchon's explorations of the struggles between conflicting forces (in this case, between industrial baron and the fringe forces of labor agitators and freelance scientists/artists) to control both the rationalizing powers of scientific progress and new technology and the irrational lines of force that seem to emanate from supernatural or fantastic origins. The story begins at the Chicago World's Fair, where a group of boy-adventurers known as the Chums of Chance have travelled by airship to observe the "White City" of progress and to monitor the scene for anarchists and bomb-throwers. As the Chums return to the air, more central characters come into play – most notably the Traverse family from Colorado whose members include a dynamiting labor activist (the father, Webb Traverse), an mining engineer, a cardsharp, and a research mathematician. When Webb is assassinated, his sons take it upon themselves to take revenge on his killers. As they disperse across the globe in search of the gunmen, they encounter the Chums of Chance and a large cast of scientists, magicians, and saboteurs in a quest for the fabled city of Shambala – or at least for the technological resources that might make access to that mythological kingdom possible. In this way, the various characters sail unknowingly towards the wholesale destruction of World War I.[61]

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[60]   Se for instance William Logan and James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self*.

[61]   The title of the work is a reference to the warning against the apocalypse that is implied by the approaching world war, from 2 Peter 3:7: "… the heavens and the earth which are now kept in store by

Plot is not so much the point as is the variations on Pynchon's essential theme: that the Utopian spirit of early America has been systematically regulated into a system of exploitation and mechanized death by the forces of order and by the werewolf hunger of the unregulated capitalism. Various collective groups in this novel – artists' enclaves, labor unions, mathematician's guilds, and philanthropic visionaries (Tesla, according to Pynchon) are held in constant check by what appears to be an organized effort to squash populist uprising or prosperity for the profit of an elite few. Like *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Against the Day* mixes obsessive detail with slapstick revelry and jokes about theoretical math with bad puns and prolonged meditations on death, human exploitation, and technological genocide. Like *Vineland*, *Against the Day* goes to great lengths (some critics would say lengths too great) to portray the labor movement of California and the American West as a victim of history.

The desire for violent direct action that seen in *Vineland* grows in *Against the Day* and develops into a full-scale dramatization and identification with violent guerrilla anti-capitalism via the lionization of Webb (and, briefly, Reef) Traverse, the dynamiting "Kieseleguhr Kid" who is at explosive war with the owners of production. Kathryn Hume asserts that *Against the Day* articulates a political and religious vision previously absent from Pynchon's novels, and that this bifurcated vision includes a "serious call" to a life of political violence (i.e. terrorism)" (Hume 163).[62] While there were glimpses of violence performed by labor-agitators and revolutionaries in *Vineland*, those acts are "incompetent and ridiculous, or undercut with slapstick," but the anarchist violence of Webb Traverse (and later Reef Traverse) is "not thus

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His word are reserved against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." William E. Engle makes this observation (663).

[62]   The other "furcation" would be a call to a life of penance and good works.

compromised" (164). The Traverse boys' dynamiting (and similar terrorist activities by Italian Anarchists and the cricket-pitch frequenting "Gentleman Bomber") do not, however, disallow for the fantasy-figure of divine retribution to come forth and wreak havoc on the culture and works of the "Plutes." In fact this figure of vengeance can, because it is no longer resigned or exclusive to B-movie science fictions, assume divine proportions and significance: Pynchon unleashes this divine destruction in the form of "The Figure."

As I mentioned above, the destroying figure in *Against the Day* appears after the Vormance expedition—funded by robber-baron Scarsdale Vibe on the auspices of locating Iceland spar but more importantly to allow a secret mapping of northern terrains for the purposes of railway construction—encounters a giant, ancient, and perhaps alien "figure"—ostensibly a statue or religious monument –under the Antarctic ice. After various warnings by the sky faring Chums of Chance, local "esquimo" guides, and a wandering shaman, Vibe's scientists and profiteers attempt to excavate this Figure, believing it to be an valuable relic. Viewing it through the advanced instruments available to them on the airship *Inconvenience*, the Chums and Fleetwood Vibe encounter and image Vibe later inscribes in his journal:

> …Though details were still difficult to make out, the Figure appeared to recline on its side, an odalisque of the snows… with as little agreement among us as to its "facial" features, some describing them as "Mongoloid," others as "serpent-like." Its eyes, for the most part, if eyes be what they were, remained open, its gaze as yet undirected—though we were bound in a common terror of that moment at which it might become aware of our interest and smoothly pivot its awful head to stare us full in the face." (Pynchon 2006: 142)

The "mongoloid" and "serpent-like" features, given the ideological position of the journal's author, clearly indicates an association or combination of the *oriental* with *the monstrous*, or at least offers the two strands as sympathetic waves on the spectrum of interpretation. The terror exists in the potential for this exotic Other to wield a destructive gaze of its own, and the analytical/rationalizing power of the technologically-enhanced gaze of the colonial scientist might be reflected back through a magical/irrational system of power. The half-hearted refusal to attribute human features to the Figure ("if eyes be what they were," etc) allows for a monster that is mistakenly humanoid. The man within the rubber-suit remains visible, allows the narrative both the luxury of having the Figure be an embodied presence in the world of the novel with recognizable motivations and enviable powers of "pure destruction" while allowing also a kind of disguise through which the viewers can disavow their monstrous/destructive tendencies.

   As it awakens, the Figure announces the ensuing destruction with a kind of pre-linguistic utterance, "Nothing voiced—all hisses, a serpent, vengeful, relentless" (Pynchon 2006: 145). The ensuing destruction of the "great Northern city" at the hands of an otherworldly force then becomes both the result of the rationalist folly of colonization and the awakening of a native energy, parcel to their ancestral experience and awakened as if by prophecy not unlike, then, the folkloric evocation of Godzilla in the Toho original when in fact the monster was "created" (mutated) by atomic testing: "The man-shaped light will not deliver you," it allegedly declared, and, "Flames were always your destiny, my children" (Pynchon 2006: 145).

   Against the Day does not overtly have a film referent to make (excepting one reference to the Lumière brothers' film *Panorama du Grand Canal pris d'un bateau*), as its plot events occur before the global popularization of film (Pynchon 2006: 854). If there is an antecedent in popular representations of monstrosity for the Figure, it is in the "genre" novels like the *Chums of*

Chance series or at least in the consistent appearance of folkloric underground monsters). But the novel's preoccupation with waves and energy anticipates the sort of essential representation of kaiju and Godzilla in particular. As Brophy puts it, "Godzilla …is here to embody energy *per se*, and to perform the action of willfully unleashing that energy without control. In short, the Japanese monster movie is …about monstrous energy" (Brophy 41). The function of the creature making and monster walking (and of course, ghost talking) in *Against the Day* must serve some function other than color, and that function is this: to stand in for the utopian desire for a "commonwealth of the oppressed" that the Traverse family seeks to create through its labor "agitation," a kind of "class hostility" with a "lack of analysis" (942). Pynchon's kaiju explode the repressed energies not only of the native peoples eradicated by the rationalizing forces of colonial expansion but also of pro-union activists who had been systematically silenced by anti-union forces. Pynchon must operate in a mode of wildly exaggerated fancy and non-reality, adopting modes of the adventure tale, the ghost story, and the orgiastic destruction of *kaiju eiga* if he is going to tell a story of equitable conditions for laborer and owner. As above in *Vineland*, Pynchon must, to imagine a just and equitable world, create a fiction of monsters, airships, adolescent fantasy and magical mathematics; to create anarchist heroes without the stylistic drudgery of "movement" fiction of the thirties, Pynchon must dress his pro-labor agitators in the guise of cowboys, exotic geniuses, and giant monsters. Every character in ATD is in disguise; every monster a utopian (or anti-Utopian) allegory for the forces of history.

And of course the Figure, acting in the Western "classical" warning-function of the monster, heralds to the Chums and the other assembled scientists and dreamers who people the nineteenth century "World's Fair" of *Against the Day* the inevitable and total destruction of the first World War.

The dialectic established by Pynchon's kaiju is one of increasing violence; this line follows both developments in organized violence and armed conflict (either state-sponsored or state-opposed) and also in what appears to be Pynchon's opinions about the failures the failures of the utopian anarchies and or subversions of the counter-culture movements of the 1950s and 1960s, from its jazz/beat poetry/marijuana phase through the psychedelic/ "flower-power" engorgements and eventual collapse after Altamont and the Manson killings stalled darkened the kind of ideological intervention that had been occurring in the in the youth culture.[63] Pynchon's *kaiju* come more and more to resemble the both sides of this conflict.[64] Of course this is the same action/reaction cycle in which Modernism could flower after World War I, only this particular iteration of military innovation/aesthetic response occurs much further down the line from the total, open-war seizure of the cultural sphere that World War I caused. The violent changes in seeing were instead the smaller "police actions" of Korea and Vietnam and the steady accumulations and maneuverings of the Cold Wars against Communism (circa 1950s- 1980s). These smaller assaults on being are followed by the Hot/Cold wars against Islamic fundamentalism (from the 1980s up through the present, though especially in its Gulf war and post 9-11 expressions). Pynchon's kaiju behave in much the same way as these military actions

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[63] I use these two examples as events that had occurred after what Hunter S. Thompson called the "high water mark" of the 60s peace movement. A variety of factors contributed to these failures, many of which Pynchon interrogates through *Vineland*. That novel attributes equal blame both to ineffectual "longhair" hold-outs like Zoyd Wheeler and to those former freaks who had been coerced one way or another into collaborating with the agents of control in what would become known as the War on Drugs.

[64] The "People's Republic of Rock and Roll" thus may have fallen to the fate warned by Nietzsche (Beyond Good and Evil): "Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

and their dialectical counter-culture syntheses. First, the Adenoid of *Gravity's Rainbow*: a fantasy of anarchy and destruction which causes no real damage (although London is of course torn apart by the blitz). If Vietnam was a sham put on by the US government in a fantasy of containing communism and one that ultimately failed, then the symbolic, "freaky," and in many cases ineffectual anti-war and anti-state demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes of the 1960s continued on in its mirror-image. In *Vineland*, a swift and covert "guerrilla action" in the form of the "stomped" military industrial complex (itself a shadowy and covert set of meanings) is the monstrous image of the covert and direct-action operations of the US government in Laos, Cambodia, and later even more covertly in South America, Africa, and the Balkans (with the Reagan administration's escapades in Central America as particularly effective examples). The concomitant rise of this "guerilla" warfare against the state can be seen in the rise of militia and other populist armed-citizenry movements, as well as the direct action programs of environmental groups like Earth First. *Against the Day* continues this cycle with a large scale, cataclysmic attack on an entire city in the form of a "culture clash" between an ancient, vengeful and oriental-ized religious figure and a modernized, commercially vibrant urban center. The Figure is clearly and obviously the embodiment of large-scale domestic terrorism on the scale of the Oklahoma city bombings or the September 11th attacks. If we maintain that Godzilla is a particularly Japanese creature born specifically from the atom bombings of Japan by the US, then the Figure of *Against the Day* is a kind of American Godzilla born not of an atomic trauma but of cultural conflict and domestic terrorism.

This move towards greater scale violence happens alongside portraits of failed utopian desires of the "counterforce" of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the failure of the hippies and freaks in *Vineland* to carve out a community in the state-run war on drugs, and in the failure of scientific rationalism

and anti-trust labor movements in *Against the Day*. The novels thus work towards endorsing greater escalations of violence as the only effective means to fighting anti-utopias. This ambivalence can be seen distinctly in *Against the Day* after the awakening of the odalisque figure and its revelatory utterances of condemnation and its destruction of the Northern City. "In the Eskimo view," says Fleetwood Vibe to the Inquiry Committee appointed to investigate the event, "someone of our party… showed deep disrespect, causing the Power to follow its nature, in exacting appropriate vengeance" (Pynchon 2006, 151). Cohen observes this ambivalence as part of the complex role that giants and giant monsters play in the building of national and individual identities: "Mortal enemy and beloved companion, dead thing (stone statue, landscape) and vitally embodied, the giant is the crushing figure from whose gaze one flees in terror… and the mirthful monster in whose embrace one rediscovers a forgotten world of pleasure and consumption. (Cohen 1999 xiii). The Kaiju in Pynchon's novel have become less and less the stuff of silly monster movies and more and more often a truly destructive force of action.

Or maybe the special effects are just getting better and we no longer view these monstrous romps as silly and childish. Perhaps then it is a matter of scale, another fascination of *kaiju* film. Some of the pleasure of these films comes from the anarchic and joyful destructions and melee of what appear to be giants as they obliterate the elaborately constructed sets which contain them – and which are designed in fact to create the illusion of gigantism in the first place. Pynchon's work reads as a long meditation on combining gigantism with minutiae. These aspects play out in sheer volume of pages, characters, references, the immense scope of the novels, and the constant zooms in and out from great distances. These novels go high in the air and look downwards at so many scattered and scattering details, and such differences in scale and

perspective play a "nonrealistically large role" in Pynchon's stories (Hume 11). The aggregation of minutiae into something gigantic (and essentially plotless) allows these works to explode in an eruption of narrative energy as opposed to rational and well–tailored novels that work toward the maintenance or restoration of order and bourgeoisie longing. Pynchon's novels are tremendous exploded-view diagrams in which the details and parts work to obscure the whole rather than cohere it. Kaiju are unmistakably present in the spirit of these novels because they are models of his preferred form: giant creatures of unknowable complexity, stomping across miniature reproductions of global post-industrial culture, delighting in the destruction, overt fakery, and performativity of monstrous garb.

Of course then if Pynchon's kaiju are models for his work then they are also maps to that work's reading. Understanding *kaiju* can also help in illuminating the act of "reading Pynchon." Joyce Boss identifies a persistent value in the world of Godzilla fandom and at work in kaiju film, what she calls the "Godzilla Aesthetic": one that "eschews sleekness and stylishly wrought terror" in favor of an "inordinate attention to minutia" (Boss 46). This description may well characterize Pynchon's fiction, and inadvertently characterizes the body of Pynchon criticism. Both oeuvres who have been accused of indulgence in inordinate attention to minutia. As Boss notes, "It is often painfully obvious that buildings, cityscapes, bridges dams and vehicles destroyed in the monster's wake are, in fact, models and therefore *fake*, consequently… fair game for ridicule. And yet, the model sets are created in meticulous detail. Yes they simply become fodder for Godzilla's rampages, but a sensitive observer… cannot help but notice the loving care with which those sets are constructed and, inevitably, destroyed…" (Boss 47). Hoist this interpretive image onto the act of reading Pynchon, and it may help to answer questions about the persistent engagement with works that many find overly-elaborate, unreadable,

plotless, and unrealistic. Pynchon's novels operate on their readers in the same way Godzilla

movies operate on their audience: as Phillip Brophy puts it, they delight in "the sensation of

being disoriented by overt fakery instead of [being] overcome by verisimilitude" (Brophy 39).

Rather than apologize for our preoccupation, Pynchon fans and critics can instead revel in

creation of an elaborate fictional labyrinth that by design resists interpretation and courts a

violent deconstruction. We can, as it were, stomp Tokyo.

CHAPTER IV

VIDEO NASTIES AND THE MONSTROUS BODIES OF *AMERICAN PSYCHO*

When Norman Mailer described Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* as "a monstrous book with a monstrous thesis," he clearly used the word *monstrous* as a value judgment on the graphic murder sequences of the novel—rather than, say, on the essay about Huey Lewis that also appears in the book (Mailer 183). But *monstrous* implies a great deal more than Mailer may have intended. *American Psycho* can predominantly be read as a satire of consumer culture and the hegemonizing and dehumanizing forces of global capital on language & identity. But Ellis's controversial novel originated in a media ecology pervaded by popular images of horror and monstrosity (the VHS explosion of the 1980s, for instance, and the ensuing direct-to-video market upon which cheaply produced and marginally regulated horror and slasher films were able to extend their already sizeable reach over the popular imagination).[65] Many critics who note the influence of horror-video on *American Psycho* use slasher films to emphasize Patrick Bateman's empty consumerism, misogyny, and narcissism (see Allué), to express Patrick's exploitation of/violence against otherness (see

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[65]   Of course, slasher films were popular long before VHS. But home video was what made the films such a threat; in fact it was this "home invasion" (and the concomitant exposure of children to such films) that made TV crusaders like Mary Whitehead campaign to have horror films banned in the UK. See for instance Peter Chippendale's 1982 Sunday Times article "How High Street Horror is Invading the Home" for examples of this rhetoric.

Freccero), or to indicate the consuming/hegemonic nature of finance capitalism/corporate yuppie-ism (see Lee, Kooijiman and Laine, Heyler). Most often, horror film is observed as another of the many aggregate media discourses through which Patrick struggles to achieve and control his identity (see Storey, Kelly, Blazer, Annesley, et al).

Perhaps *American Psycho* reads as "monstrous" because it has integrated the social/symbolic functions of a monster and the ritualized social "celebration" of that monster's defeat through horror film and video. Through a well-chronicled media uproar, the novel came to occupy an ambiguous literary position, its structures resisting definition and containment; as Tania Modleski says of contemporary horror film, *American Psycho* appears apocalyptic, nihilistic, and "hostile to meaning, form, pleasure, and the specious good" (Modleski 767).

I would like to restore to *American Psycho* the presence of cinematic monstrosity as a de-stabilizing force, one that disrupts Patrick's social agenda instead of affirming it, and one that restores to Patrick's relentless first person narrative the possibility of interruption and subversion. This restoration can occur by exploring the behavioral and contextual affinities that the novel shares with our cultural reception of monsters and video-horror. By contextualizing *American Psycho* within a generic chronology of horror video and "video nasties" (and, as we'll find, punk rock), readers can further examine how a cinematic monstrosity informs the style and structures of Ellis's much maligned work (and, briefly, Mary Harron's 2000 film adaptation).[66] We can recognize the presence of horror video and its cultural subversions in *American Psycho* as an act of interruption by first assuming that horror film relies for its content on *the depiction of monstrosities that both determine and refute the boundaries of what is and what is not civilization.* (We'll get to the video nasties later.)

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[66]   For a more detailed look at the novel's "rehabilitation" through Harron's film, see Eldridge.

The Monster-Function

Noel Carroll ascribes the above-mentioned boundary-function to monsters and horror in *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. The ideological project of the monster film according to Carroll is to dramatize a disruption (and most often a restoration) of moral order: the pleasure of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1932), the argument suggests, occurs when the villagers vanquish the creature, and Henry can assume his proper role in society as a husband and man of the community. Bruce Kawin elaborates on this narrative function: "although the more common impulse in the horror film is to exorcise the demon and save the community (*Vampyr, Jaws, The Thing, Tarantula, The Blob, Frankenstein,* etc.), there is a parallel track in which the community is rightfully destroyed (*The Last Wave, Dawn of the Dead, Dr. Strangelove*)" (Kawin 685). Monsters function in these narratives as physical expressions of transgressions or violations of social and moral boundaries. In doing so they tend to signify three essential boundary concerns: spatial/geographic boundaries; biological or physical boundaries of both the individual body (as-a-body) and the social body (figured alternately as self/other, clean/unclean, subject/abject, etc); and ontological concerns of separating the *known* from the *unknown*. Monsters express these concerns as *embodied information*: the dog-headed *cynocephali* of medieval cartography; the combinatorial corporality of Frankenstein's creature; the decaying flesh and exposed organs of the zombie. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen aptly describes this signifying monstrous-body as "a category that is itself a kind of limit case, an extreme version of marginalization, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation" (Cohen ix). As a denizen of the boundary, the monster is often a projection of the anxious co-mingling of formerly separate categories—a blur, a hybrid; hence the archetypical resonance of the heterogeneous bodies of the Chimera, or the Frankenstein-ian "creature."

Etymology and tradition explain the *monster* as an expression of *warning* or *proof.* Thus monsters serve the dual function of marking physical/social boundaries and embodying the eruption, transgression, or violation of those boundaries.

American Psycho achieves these monster-functions in complicated ways. The most obvious of teratological traits presented by the novel occurs in the chimerical/"Frankensteinian" form of Patrick's narrative; much like the epistolary *Dracula* or the perhaps more relevant poly-vocalism of *Ulysses*, *American Psycho* consists essentially of the conjoining of potentially inharmonious parts or forms. Tania Modleski describes the contemporary text of horror as "a *ruptured* body, lacking the kind of integrity commonly attributed to popular narrative cinema" (767). Patrick's narrative embodies this rupture suturing together pornographic fiction, splatter-punk and slasher video scripts, men's fashion magazines, style guides, food criticism, and other sub-generic forms into a hulking, lumbering mass. Ruth Helyer prefers a more fluid image, arguing that *American Psycho* "*leaks* into different categories, demonstrating characteristics of comedy, autobiography, spoof horror, bleak social commentary, conventional horror and pornography" (Heyler 741, emphasis added). The word "leaks" draws attention to the abject functions of horror as well as the classical assignation of the monstrous to boundaries, seams, and borders.[67] Patrick himself draws attention to the novel's preoccupation with such leakage when he visits a video store that, in its generic excess, threatens his veneer:

> Since pornography seems out of the question I browse through Light Comedy and, feeling ripped off, settle for a Woody Allen movie but I'm still not satisfied. I want something else. I

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[67]   The horror film naturally deploys the abject as the source of its power, in the consistent visualization of blood, viscera, vomit, and other horrific "fluids" as well as the presence of the ultimate abject, the corpse. Elaborated in full in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film.*

pass through the Rock Musical section—nothing—then find myself in Horror-Comedy—

ditto—and suddenly I'm seized by a minor heart attack. *There are too many fucking movies to*

choose from (112).

The structure of Patrick's narrative furthers the shock of this generic abundance/transgression

through its episodic nature and almost total resistance to plot or character development, forcing the

book to exist as a collection of forms and formal discourses. When the gore arrives midway through

the book, it is like a "minor heart attack" indeed.

The shock of the gory sequences is further heightened by their juxtaposition with passages of

explicit pornography. But these passages are, structurally speaking, no different in combinatorial

"value" than the long passage in the early chapter "Morning" wherein Patrick describes his morning

toilet ritual:

> …I stand in front of a chrome and acrylic Washmobile bathroom sink – with soap dish, cup
>
> holder and railings that serve as towel bars, which I bought at Hastings to use while the
>
> marble sinks I ordered from Finland are being sanded – and stare at my reflection with the ice
>
> pack still on. I pour some Plax antiplaque formula into a stainless-steel tumbler and swish it
>
> around my mouth for thirty seconds. Then I squeeze Rembrandt onto a faux-tortoiseshell
>
> toothbrush and start brushing my teeth… and rinse with Listerine. Then I inspect my hands
>
> and use a nailbrush. I take the ice-pack mask off and use a deep –pore cleanser lotion, then an
>
> herb-mint facial masque which I leave on while I check my toenails. (Ellis 26)

American Psycho is almost entirely written in this exhausted language of a commodity/material

culture, cobbled together (like Frankenstein's creature) in a "workshop of filthy creation." Eldridge

convincingly argues that it is not Ellis's pornographic or violent material that marked *American*

Psycho as a transgressive beast, but rather Ellis's violation of generic boundaries and the novel's

resistance to generic definition that posed the greatest "threat" to the literary-critical establishment;

the novel depends upon an "explicit destabilization" of genres for this effect (26).

In their incessant juxtaposition with each other, this intermingling of sub-generic categories makes

a kind of leap towards inaccessibility. Repulsive in its inclusion of pornographic, misogynistic and

graphically violent material, and essentially, well, *boring* in its determined inclusion of the

commodified languages of fashion, food, and advertising copy, *American Psycho* not only threatens

the reader by violating standards of acceptability (for instance) and generic classification but by

doing so with material that strives to be *unreadable*. As Marco Abel puts it, the "unmodulated"

voice of the narrator "creates enormous resistance" for readers, and the novel's formal excess

"overwhelms, frustrates, annoys, upsets, and even sickens; it is this (literal) overkill that provokes

readers to throw away the book, to tear it apart, to spit at it—and potentially, to talk or write about it"

(144). So Patrick's narrative threatens and repulses like a monster due to its superficial and

combinatorial form as well as its refutation of the act of reading, rendering it a half-creature of the

literary margins.

Aside from its own 'formal' expressions of the monster-function, one would expect a monstrous

body (or perhaps an figure of embodied monstrosity) to appear in the text—some locus of horror to

be identified, in Noel Carroll's words, "in terms of threat and disgust" (28). The source of the novel's

repulsive overkill is ostensibly Patrick himself, though he is a handsome and financially successful

yuppie. Describing Patrick as a monster is a solely moral-critical act based on his homicidal

behavior: he certainly fulfills the threat function, but he fails to embody the kind of hybridism or

repulsion necessary to the monstrous body. In fact, Patrick signifies the opposite for most of the

book: he is "toned," "worked out," and essentially a complete "hotty." He is immaculately groomed

and dressed. His body marks not disruption or Otherness but normalcy. As James Annesley notes,

"Ellis adds to this disturbing vision by presenting Bateman not as some horrific aberration, but as a

yuppie everyman. He is, as far as his elite acquaintances are concerned, essentially normal" (19). Early in the novel, Evelyn's comments about Tim Price negate the only claims to actuality Patrick has: when Patrick suggests that Evelyn is attracted to Tim because he is rich, good-looking and has a great body, Evelyn responds with "*Everybody's* rich… *Everybody's* good-looking… *Everybody* has a great body now" (23). So Patrick—rich, good-looking, possessed of a good body—is the everyman of his culture. Harron's film exchanges this normalcy for an exaggerated desirability, introducing Patrick to the audience while he narrates his morning bathing ritual (as mentioned above). The camera lingers over Patrick's nude body, shows him stretching and working out, showering, and sets him as a lavish display of eroticized masculinity. He is therefore made not only desirable but accessible, perfected. Even when the film eventually unleashed Patrick in his most "gruesome" form (the scene where he chases and murders Christine with a chainsaw), he appears buffed out and to an extent comical (he's wearing trainers).

This desirability makes it difficult to reconcile Patrick's "every-body" as that of the typical monster, or as its dialectical progeny the "slasher" or serial killer (in its usual filmic appearances). While inhuman movie-monsters assumed baroque and bestial forms to clearly signify their transgressive nature, the movie-slasher assumes a more human form, albeit one that is marked as aberrant. Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* characterizes the slasher as *symbolically* if not physically monstrous. She describes the slasher-figure as "recognizably human, but …only marginally so, just as they are only marginally visible—to their victims and to us, the spectators" (Clover 30). The symbolic-repulsion of the killer is typically expressed through obscuring or damaging their faces (*Halloween, Red Dragon*) and their gender roles (Norman Bates in *Psycho*), dressing them in dead skin, often female (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Silence of the Lambs*), or playing them as rural "in-breds," shut-ins, or other countrified marginalia (Clover 162).

One faces difficulty locating Patrick in these patterns; he is both highly visible (as narrator) and physically "perfect" or desirable (at least according to his narrative). It is not Patrick but his victims who are predominantly marginalized—the homeless, non-whites, prostitutes, homosexuals. The aggregate effect of Patrick's relentless point-of-view operating in the absence of a monstrous body forces readers into an indelicate position: if Patrick is in fact not only "normal" in appearance but also designates a cultural ideal, then the only monstrous bodies of the text are actually the "hardbodies," "bums," "faggots," and other non-white, non-heterosexual male, non-yuppies who Patrick mutilates in his horrific escapades. In the vacuum of generic expectation left by the absence of a monstrous body, threat and repulsion are doubled back onto the bodies of the victims. Part of the horrific effect of *American Psycho* results therefore not through the depiction of morally reprehensible acts but through their embodiment in what amounts to a cultural ideal; not by endorsing or displaying sexual, economic and physical violence but by forcing the reader to identify with it.

Harron's adaptation avoids the monstrous complications of this absent-monster entirely. The film for instance portrays the prostitute "Christie" as sympathetic through not only her performance but also in the ways in which the camera addresses her.[68] The film has neither the time nor the narrative "space" to incorporate the catalog of commercialized, sub- and pan-generic language on which Ellis's novel depends for most of its genre-suturing effects. The "language" of splatter-film and splatter-fiction, therefore, are out, as are the deliberate mention of horror film titles. Furthermore, the audience of the film must accept that Patrick is in fact a muscular, fit, and attractive "stud" because

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[68]   These strategies are deftly summarized by Murphet, 74-75.

he the role is performed by (for all intents and purposes) a muscular, fit, and attractive stud, Christian Bale.[69]

The film nevertheless "adapts" the novel's oblique invocation and complication of video-horror and the presence of a monstrous-body by briefly including iconographic images of horror film in its *mise-en-scène*: after one of the early murders, Patrick compulsive exercises in his apartment, skipping rope and then performing a seemingly torturous amount of crunches in front of a television playing Tobe Hooper's 1974 *Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* The soundtrack emphasizes the juxtaposition of the on-screen victim (Marilyn Burns) screaming, Patrick's heavy breathing, and of course the wailing chainsaw. As Patrick performs his exercise, the screen image shows Leatherface's famous "dance" at the end of the film, twirling the chainsaw around in circles. Contrasting Patrick's perfect body with the bloated, shapeless and seemingly rotten form of Leatherface creates a complex juxtaposition of health vs. degeneration, control vs. disorder, and bourgeoisie comfort versus rural something decay.[70] Harron therefore draws attention to her film's absence of a monstrous-body for Patrick by offering a visible and recognizable foil.

Generically speaking, Harron's film "uses" real horror video for a prop instead of taking on the formal behaviors of horror. *American Psycho* does eventually demonstrate some of those behaviors (excess, gore, disrupted/dismembered bodies) when Patrick attacks the prostitute Christie; however,

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[69]   The reality of Bale's attractiveness is much more difficult to dispute than the alleged attractiveness of Patrick, who constitutes an exaggerated lesson in unreliable narration.

[70]   Of course Leatherface only appears to be rotten because he wears a mask made of human skin. Eldridge usefully details some of the similarities between *Texas Chainsaw* and Harron's Patrick Bateman: 30-31.

the sequence's descent into improbability and satire allows movie to "play" at being a slasher film for a few minutes, without ever committing itself to being a "real" horror film.

Patrick is a moral "monster," but his monologue (and physique in the film adaptation) prevents us from experiencing him as a monstrous body; likewise, his narrative appears to deny the signifying possibilities of the monstrous body by refuting the generic expectations of the Monster. Perhaps we can turn to the historical expressions of horror to locate the potential for marginality somewhere within *American Psycho*.

Video Nasties

A historical conflagration of monstrosity, video horror, and subversive potential can be located in *American Psycho* around a media phenomenon affectionately referred to in fandom as "the Video Nasty" controversy.

Video and video art assumes a significant narrative presence in Ellis's work. For instance, video plays an important role in the central conflicts of *Less Than Zero*—for instance, in the MTV/ music video-obsessed fashion of the novel's young players. But video not only provides characterization, but also provides pivotal plot points in an otherwise "plotless" novel. In one of the traumatic revelations at the core of novel, the narrator Clay is shown what appears to be an actual snuff film, wherein two teenagers are sexually abused and tortured to death.[71] Thus video and the video image in *Less Than Zero* becomes an estranging and dehumanizing medium, implicitly violent.

Video and horror video continue this estranging/traumatizing function in *American Psycho*. Video aesthetics consistently mark the style of the narration, consisting of "smash cuts", "jump cuts,"

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[71]   Some of the characters argue about the authenticity of the footage (an authenticity the novel does not confirm).

music-videos and the cliché language of Hollywood narratives (Annesley 90). Patrick's perception

of his lunch with Jean in the chapter "End of the 1980s" neatly encapsulates the interference of video

language on Patrick's narrative:

> Jean is looking good… I'm imagining myself on television, in a commercial for a new
>
> product—wine cooler? Tanning lotion? Sugarless gum?—and I'm moving in jump cut,
>
> walking along a beach, the film is black and white, purposefully scratched, eerie vague pop
>
> music from the mid-1960s accompanies the footage… Now I'm looking into the camera, now
>
> I'm holding up the product—a new mousse? Tennis shoes?—now my hair is windblown then
>
> it's day then night then day again and then it's night. (Ellis 372)

Note the total lack of continuity in this flow of information, as well as the physical presence of the

film apparatus in this imaginative space (the scratches on the film and acknowledgement of the

camera). As Annesley notes, the "terse" delivery of the narrative events "mimics the swift flow of

images on MTV and creates the impression that this medium not only reflects the wider environment

and influences the imaginations of those living within it, but also affects the way those experiences

are narrated" (Annesley 372). Murphet, concentrating on the scenes of torture, observes that, for

Patrick "there is no act … that has not been mediated through the screen, whether large or small, and

that for the most part the logic of his perceptions and actions in the violent sequences is explicitly

presented in terms of cuts, zooms, and pans, and with all the creaking voyeurism of the 'video-

nasties' he compulsively [rents]" (Murphet 73).

Patrick consumes the video-language of his culture and reproduces the violence of horror videos.

David Eldridge has identified how several of Patrick's violent acts seem to originate specifically

from well-known "ultra-violent" genre films: *Friday the 13th*, *Hatchet for the Honeymoon*, *The Texas

Chainsaw Massacre*, and *A Clockwork Orange*, among others (30-31). Patrick includes technical

details of the video apparatus with pornographic detail and detachment: "in an attempt to understand

these girls I'm filming their deaths. With Torri and Tiffany I use a Minox LX ultra-miniature camera

that takes 9.5mm film, has a 15mm f/3.5 lens, an exposure meter and a built in neutral density filter

that sits on a tripod" (Ellis 304). In addition to producing these videos, Patrick also consumes horror

and slasher videos with pathological obsession. He has rented *Body Double* (1984) thirty-seven

times, for instance, and often uses his need to return videos as an alibi for his absence. The titles

Patrick rents (those mentioned specifically or obliquely in the text) include *Psycho, Friday the 13th*

Part XVII, Driller Killer, Tool Box Murders, and *Body Double*.[72] Other titles appear to be fictional

(*Blonde, Hot, Dead* and *Bloodhungry*).[73] The two most notorious films mentioned in the text are

Psycho and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The inclusion of *Psycho* may seem obvious, given the

title of Ellis's novel and the profound impact the Hitchcock film had on horror films. Patrick may

dismiss the film as "disappointing," but his likeness to Norman Bates is reflected not only in his

surname but in his voyeurism, necrophilia, and occasional ineffectuality. While Patrick never

mentions renting *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, he specifically mentions it during a conversation

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[72]   The film that gets the most attention in the novel (and therefore from critics) is *Body Double*; but

describing *Body Double* as a "slasher" may be problematic. For the purposes of this essay, *Body Double*

performs the functions of slasher-video and can be suspended within that genre's associational web-work

for the time being.

[73]   ASIDE: There doesn't appear to be a movie named *Blood Hungry* available on video that was about

homicidal clowns (see AP 249). Ellis may have been inspired here by *The Kill* aka *Blood Hunger* (1968),

though chronologically speaking, more likely suspects exist in the films *Vampyres* aka *Blood Hunger*

(1974) or *The Thirsty Dead* aka *The Blood Cult of Shangri-La* aka *Blood Hunt* aka *Blood Hunger* (1974).

Of course, Patrick occasionally errs on titles & artists, for instance ascribing the Rolling Stones single

"You Can't Always Get What You Want" to The Beatles.

about Ed Gein (154) and more obliquely when he claims to be haunted by the phrase "isolated farmhouse" (Ellis 383).

Two other titles—*Driller Killer* (1979, Abel Ferrara) and *The Toolbox Murders* (1978, Dennis Donnelly) – may not resonate as notoriously with American audiences, though perhaps the arresting use of power tools in the titles may seem almost obvious in the broad wake of possibility which trailed *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. But *Driller Killer* is a significant title in the history of slasher film due to its importance in the so-called "Video Nasty" furor in England during the early nineteen-eighties, and can therefore help expose some of the historical and aesthetic context to the novel.

My paraphrases of this material can be attributed *The Seduction of the Gullible: The Curious History of the British "Video Nasties" Phenomenon* by John Martin and *See No Evil: Banned Films and Video Controversy* by David Kerekes and David Slater (as well as various internet chronologies). In the early 1980s, home video rental in England was essentially unregulated except for the *Obscene Publications Act* of 1959 which policed the release of erotic film materials. As VCR sales and home video rentals in Great Britain grew, more and more horror titles flooded the market. These titles were notoriously cheap and quick to produce, and those that fared poorly in theaters found great success on the home-video market. *Driller Killer* became infamous when its UK distributors, Vipco, ran full-page advertisements in video-trade magazines for the film featuring the box-cover art: a scene from the film depicting a victim's head being penetrated by a power drill. The text read "THE BLOOD RUNS IN RIVERS...AND THE DRILL KEEPS TEARING THROUGH FLESH AND BONE." Go Video repeated this lurid advertising campaign strategy for films like *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and SS *Experiment Camp* (1978). Eventually, the public outcry by children's advocates and morality campaigners like Mary Whitehouse (who popularized the phrase "video nasty") lead to the introduction of the *Video Recordings Act* of 1984. The act not only regulated videos in the UK but resulted in a notorious list of "banned films"—some of which remain unavailable in Great Britain at the time of this writing. The list ironically drew a great deal of

attention to films which may never have been otherwise "hired"—films like *Cannibal Ferox*, *Nightmare in a Damaged Brain*, and of course *Driller Killer*. Thus, these low-budget films "exploitation films" challenged public standards of decency, creating a demand for more and more horrific titles as well as the legislation which eventually made them illegal. Films like *Driller Killer*, through their vigorous challenging of the limits of representation, engineered their own obsolescence.

And while there are some interesting similarities between *American Psycho* and *Driller Killer* (homeless victims, for one), my point is not to claim that these films are sources for Ellis's novel, or that they provide literal antecedents or inspiration for Ellis's text. One would find that line of inquiry more successful, I think, if one were to consult back issues of *GQ*, *Penthouse Forums*, and a copy of Bruce Boyer's *Guide to Quality Menswear.* My point is rather to develop the contextual relationship between *American Psycho* and the media-atmosphere in which it was written, one in which graphic horror-video was able to become a popular *domestic* product while simultaneously challenging the stability of the family and social units wherein it was consumed. Robin Wood for instance characterized *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as an attack on capitalism and the family; Modleski maintains that many horror films "engage in an assault on all that bourgeois culture is supposed to cherish" (Wood 20-22; Modleski 767). The inclusion then to references to the video-nasties help to interrupt the dominance of Patrick's monologue: their presence indicates an attack on the world from which he comes, and places him in a particular historical point that can then be exploited as a moment of resistance/eruption. These oblique, low-frequency references to the political and social debates surrounding representation and social limits suggest that the novel offers a more complicated historico-political content than perhaps suggested by its satire of the abstracting powers of finance and the exploitive nature of wealth.

But another "high-frequency" connection exists between Ellis and the "video nasties," one rooted in the influence of Thatcherite England on the image and culture of punk rock music of the 1980s. British punk rock stalwarts The Damned released a single called "Nasty" (1984) which proclaims "I

fell in love with a video nasty" and continues "All I want is to make a killing/ to drill a killer might really be thrilling" (The Damned). The desire to shock inherent in any of this-or-that punk movements of the seventies and eighties, as well as the "DIY" ethos which became central to punk as a mode of discourse, found a kind of collegial sympathy in the home-video horror market. Both often relied on shock, subversion, and cheap production and distribution standards for its expression. The ensuing hybridizations between punk and horror are numerous, e.g. The Damned's "Nasty," Bad Brains' "Fearless Vampire Killers," The Misfits'' "Horror Hotel" (or, really, *anything* by the Misfits), etc. One single by The Damned is of interest herein not only because the band is explicitly mentioned in *Less Than Zero* but also because of Ellis's aesthetic/ethical connection to the punk movement, and its presence in *American Psycho* as a kind of foil to Patrick's yuppie-isms. In his incessantly deadened prose and the social critique imbedded in his fictions, Ellis displays what Murphet calls "punk nihilism," characterized by a "nihilistic contempt for established middle-class conformity, sartorial menace and loud metallic noise" (Murphet 21). James Annesley agrees, citing Ellis as exemplary of his generation of writer's preoccupation with "disaffection, decadence and brutality"—all hallmarks of rock and roll in the early days and its essential resurgence in the anarcho-decadence of UK punk from the seventies and eighties (Annesley 2). Geoffrey O'Brien, during his homage to Italian horror films in *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the Twentieth Century*, describes the Italian cannibal/zombie film "invasion" (post-*Dawn of the Dead*) and manages to indicate a nature fitting as a description for both the boredom/monotony and the violent pedigree of *American Psycho*:

> In a kind of twilight state—as if in homage to the spirit of minimalism and punk—the artisans
> of Rome served up elegantly monotonous variations on the themes of mutilation and ingestion:
> *Slaves of the Cannibal God, Cannibal Holocaust, Cannibal Apocalypse, Apocalypse*
> *Tomorrow, Anthropophagus, Anthropophagus II, Island of the living Dead, City of the Walking*

> *Dead, City of the Living Dead, Zombie Holocaust, Cut and Run, Trap Them and Kill Them,*
>
> *Make Them Die Slowly*. (O'Brien 171)

Thus, when the "buried" presence of the video nasties can be unearthed despite Ellis's "aesthetics of

boredom," Patrick's horrific exploits can be viewed in their proper punk/horror context (Murphet

24)*. Driller Killer* and the other films thus strangely coordinate with the novel's repulsing strategies,

contextualizing Patrick Bateman as a symptom of the boundary-crossings and "mutilating"

tendencies of punk and video horror. Ellis encodes (however obliquely) into the text a punk ethos

that can serve as a point of resistance to Patrick's "elegantly monotonous" hegemony.

The Company of Wolves

The slasher film (and its punk rock permutations) is not the only traces of the monster to perform

such a function in Ellis's novel. Consider the werewolf: the 1980s were a good time for lycanthropy,

and werewolves and wolf-men enjoyed an exciting revival of sorts through popular entertainment.

John Landis's immensely successful *American Werewolf in London* inspired the usual imitations

(*Wolfen*, *the Company of Wolves, Silver Bullet*). One of those imitations, *The Howling*, would go on

to generate several sequels. Repetition spawned parody in *Teen Wolf*; Michael Jackson's music video

Thriller set new ground for standards in music video production.

We would be amiss to leave the werewolf/wolf-man out of our examination of *American Psycho*.

Some minor evidence of a lycanthropic body (as a monstrous archetype) does appear early in the

text: Timothy Price grins at Evelyn in a "wolfish, lewd way," and later directs a "grim wolf whistle"

at a woman he and Patrick pass on the street (19). Note that these minor incidents are attributed not

to Patrick but to Price who, near the beginning of the novel, "escapes" down an underground tunnel

in a night club, disappearing from the narrative until the book's concluding chapters when he re-

appears as if nothing has happened. So even the faintest trace of the wolf-monster can indicate a possibility for escape from a totalizing cultural narrative.

Lycanthropos makes a final appearance in the chapter "Dinner With Secretary": Patrick takes Jean to a restaurant named Arcadia, explains the origin of the name of the bar, and grapples with the urge to murder her. Lycaon, King of Arcadia, was the first werewolf. As the story goes, Jupiter stays as guest in Lycaon's house, and the king violates the "host-guest relationship" by trying to kill Jupiter in his sleep and, failing that, attempting to feed Jupiter the remains of one of his murdered servants (Cohen 13). Jupiter punishes him by turning him into a wolf that retains some of his "human shape." Cohen reads the transformation as such:

> The horribly fascinating loss of Lycaon's humanity merely reifies his previous moral state; the king's body is rendered all transparence, instantly and insistently readable. The power of the narrative prohibition peaks in the lingering description of the monstrously composite Lycaon, at that median where he is both man and beast, dual natures in a helpless tumult of assertion. The fable concludes when Lycaon can no longer speak, only signify. (Cohen 1996: 13)

We can project this description of Lycaon onto Patrick's narrative, his barrage of seemingly meaningless language, and the novel's strategies of unreadability. Thus the wolf-man can resonate through the text, repaying the novel's "inhospitality" with a promise of transformation and the transgressive power of the monster.

Novels like *American Psycho* that attempt to incorporate these interstitial figures of horror cinema into their narrative structure—the eruptive and bestial body of the werewolf, the disruptive, hybrid body of the chimera, the transgressive body-work of the cannibal, the fractured subjectivity of the slasher/serial killer—become monsters themselves in both form and effect. The value, then, in Mailer's description of the book as *monstrous* is that it offers the possibility of difference in a narrative world of gentrification and hegemonization. The monstrous body becomes a utopian space,

a site of radical potential; the video nasty (as a kind of punk/horror meme) can help provide an

"escape hatch" for a narrative that seemingly obstructs all exits.

CHAPTER V:

VIDEO HORROR AND DON DELILLO'S *POINT OMEGA*

"There's something poignant about men sitting in a room looking at extremely amateurish

footage of a horrible event and trying to extract truth from it."

-Don DeLillo, *Libra.*

Don DeLillo will provide a useful comparison to Ellis and help to demonstrate the

increasingly iconic status that video-horror and slasher films have come to assume in

contemporary narrative. In his late work, DeLillo makes consistent use of video/horror as a

provocation to and comment on narrative and language.

DeLillo often constructs his novels in the same sub-generic combinatorial fashion like the

one seen in *American Psycho* — what John Johnston calls DeLillo's "genre problem" (Johnston

261). Tom LeClair describes *White Noise* for instance as collage of inverted literary subgenre:

the college novel, the disaster novel and domestic "around-the-house-and-in-the-yard" drama

(LeClair 2003: 7). Douglas Keesey calls the book a "generic hybrid," a heterogeneous mixture of

dramas domestic, apocalyptic, and criminal (Keesey 133). Observe too the stark or sparse

sentences of DeLillo's later work, of which Ellis's early work seems definitively styled.[74] The

two authors can be distinguished as representing two different generations (or "schools") not

only in age but by sensibility. DeLillo's perspective falls more within the scope of the post-Cold

War boomers,[75] while Ellis is generally associated with the postmodern malaise and dis-affection

of the "MTV generation."[76] This distinction is useful here in that Ellis's literary investigations

into horror video occurred at the height of the VHS boom; DeLillo's *Point Omega* occurs far

after that boom and bust cycle has been followed by horror revitalizations and rebirths, both at

the box office and via the "high culture" appropriations of contemporary video- and installation-

art like Douglas Gordon's glacial homage to Hitchcock in *24 Hour Psycho* or the monstrous

transformations of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* (1994-2002). I will concentrate here on

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[74]   …though Ellis attributes this style to the influence of Joan Didion, especially *Play It As It Lays*. See

Murphet 12.

[75]   See Knight for instance.

[76]   Locating DeLillo on the trajectory of Modern and Postmodern literature is trickier, and he occupies a

contested critical space in the regard. Novels like *White Noise* (1985) and *Libra* (1988) are readily

integrated into cases made for the "postmodern turn" in American fictions (Knight 27), but later works

like *The Body Artist* (2001) and *Point Omega* (2010) tend to resemble the silence, shocked banality, and

polyvocalism of Joyce and Beckett (Nel 13-15). Cowart staunchly places DeLillo as postmodern in his

logic and execution (1-13). Thankfully, it is better for my purposes to have the two distinctions conflated:

DeLillo and Ellis share a fascination with the legacy of the Moderns, and that their explorations and

exercises with language and its limits are not only central to their fiction but also the commonality

between the two. That is, the two authors tend to explore issues often associated with postmodernism but

seem to do so in the tradition of the Moderns and with their same exacting (and often distracting)

language games.

DeLillo's most recent novel, *Point Omega* (2006) which, like *American Psycho*, overtly displays knowledge of specific horror films, one made clear immediately in the framing chapters "Anonymity" and "Anonymity 2" as narrative style and perspective becomes a shifting series of (mis)identifications. I hope to demonstrate the way in which he uses the legacy and the narrative techniques and fluid identification opportunities of horror films like *Psycho* to critique the historic "breaks" that function not only as the wish-objects of modernism but also as the impetus for the war on terror.

The Moment of Psycho

It is on Gordon's post-cinematic video installation piece that DeLillo's *Point Omega* depends to link its thematic concerns over memory, time, and trauma.[77] Holger Broeker's description of the physical components of Gordon's work can set the scene:

> Gordon's video installation consists of a commercially available video cassette of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho,* a VCR with an infinitely adjustable speed setting, a video projector, a semi-transparent screen (300 x 400 cm or 400 x 6000 cm) suspended from the ceiling so that the lower edge is approximately at head height, and a darkened room with a minimum ceiling height of 5.2m and a minimum floor area of 14 x 7m. …Viewers entering the darkened room look up at an image in the middle of the room that changes approximately every two seconds. (Broeker 66)

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[77] Johnston points out that film "occupies a privileged place" in DeLillo's representational strategies and describes his vision as "post-cinematic" (268).

In this way, Gordon slows down Hitchcock's film so that it would take 24 hours to play in its entirety. DeLillo uses this video installation as a framing device for *Point Omega*. In the first chapter, an unnamed man watches Gordon's film in the Museum of Modern Art ("MoMA" hereafter) in New York, and invents narratives about the other spectators who enter and leave the installation space. Two of these spectators, an older man in a ponytail and a younger man in "scuffed running shoes," are the prominent characters in the longer middle section (11). Jim Finley, the young man, is a filmmaker hoping to film a documentary about Richard Elster, the older man. Elster is an academic who briefly became an advisor to the war planning committees of the Pentagon. Elster has traveled to a vacation home in the remote California desert to reflect upon his involvement; Finley has followed him there to attempt to convince him to appear in the documentary project. Elster's daughter Jessie, an "otherworldly" young woman arrives after ten days to join the two (36). Finlay devotes more and more energy to observing (and imagining an affair with) Jessie when she suddenly and inexplicably vanishes into the desert, presumably a victim of foul play. The mystery trails away into Elster's grief, and the action returns to the MoMA gallery as the unnamed spectator meets a "mysterious" woman viewing the video.[78] He leaves the abstraction of Gordon's film to attempt a connection with her, though he has already lied to her about his childhood.[79]

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[78]   Spoiler Alert, as they say: there is some evidence in the novel to suggest that the mystery woman in the gallery is Jessie, and that the "lone spectator" is the mysterious romantic interest to whom Jessie's mother attributes her eventual disappearance.

[79]   Compare this "museum connection" with DeLillo's short story "Baader-Meinhof" from 2006.

So the trace of video horror which haunts *Point Omega* bifurcates as the reader must confront both the legacy of Hitchcock's film and the abstraction and exponential enlargement in scope of Gordon's appropriation of Hitchcock.

As I have mentioned above in my discussion of Ellis, *Psycho* had the historical luck to serve as an "inaugural" cinematic text for several methodological, generic, and "theoretical" (film theory, that is) turns in the industry. Integral to Hitchcock's status as an icon, the 1960 film produced iconic images and conventions like sparks shooting from a comet: the so-called "shower scene," and its infamous, staccato musical accompaniment; the looming Bates motel; the reclusive neurotic-turned-murderer; the mirror-shaded policeman to be echoed later as the Man With No Eyes in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), *Terminator II* (1991) and *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000); all have gone into the warp and woof of post-war cinema. *Psycho* can be understood as a point on the evolutionary chart of horror film when the central threat function that had been previously served by a monster (or monsters) would come to be served rather by *slashers* or *serial killers*: human agents whose monstrosity was expressed as psychosis, schizophrenia, or some other human neurosis. These agents invariably display violent antisocial behaviors, obsessive habits, and murderous rampages (Freccero). Carol Clover also notes the acute "gender distress" in which cinematic slashers appear, and provides a useful shorthand for the post-*Psycho* success of this monstrous archetype: "The notion of a killer propelled by psychosexual fury… has proved a durable one, and the progeny of Norman Bates stalk the genre up to the present day" (Clover 27). The inhumanly-bodied monster/creature would persist of course in its countless zoological iterations.[80] Where the monster had previously defined

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[80]   Clover also rather usefully subsumes generic distinctions between monsters and slashers by relegating them to a "threat function": "Like the low-mythic tradition of which it is a part, horror is

outsider-ness (or resulted from a collision with another "foreign" culture), the slasher is a by-product of the Cold War: alongside the giant (atomic-, teenage-, etc) creature films of the fifties and sixties appeared films capitalizing on paranoia and suspicion, films wherein the threat function of the monster originates on the "inside" of society rather than across the borders of the unknown. Cold-war monsters might manifest as resembling the *self* rather than *the other*, as per *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Village of the Damned* (1960), or erupt from the self outwards rather than having an other invade or penetrate inwards as in *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), its sequel *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), and *I Bury the Living* (1958). The slasher, a seemingly "normal" person who nonetheless behaves like a monster, is a dialectical expression of this cold war tradition of horror film.

In the creation and popularization of the slasher and in the mainstreaming of violent murder, *Psycho* led nothing short of a "revolution" in film standards.[81] The film's frank depictions of sex and violence had the greatest impact on film culture – despite the fact that the sex was not actually "frank" and that the violence was barely depicted. The sex in the opening sequence is only implied, and the shower scene is a virtuoso performance of editing wherein the knife's work is only ever suggested, what critic David Thompson describes as a "bizarre duel between what is visible and what is not" (63). Thompson places *Psycho* at a cultural crossroads, and portrays it

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organized around functions that are understood to preexist and constitute character. Although a gorilla, a blob, a shark, and a motel attendant are superficially very different entities, they all do more or less the same job, narratively speaking, and they all end up at least temporarily evacuated from the operative universe" (Clover 12).

[81]   Let the record show that *Peeping Tom* was released three months earlier than *Psycho*, and is considered alongside Hitchcock's film as one of the seminal entries in genre. See Marks.

as the final doorway through which salacious sex and violence entered into the standard industry film-grammar, and wherein shock value and audience manipulation came to be recognized as an aesthetic feat to be respected in the hands of "auteur" master-craftsmen as opposed to being a gimmick in the hands of B-picture hucksters: "…the real measure of the breakthrough that had occurred—in the name of pure cinema—is in the bloodletting, sadism, and slaughter that are now taken for granted. In terms of cruelties we no longer notice, we are another species" (Thomson 67).

In terms of film criticism and theory, Hitchcock's film plays an important role on two fronts: in the popular deployment of auteur theory and in the prevalence of psychoanalytic film criticism as a tool with which to work upon horror texts. The auteur theorists privileged the director as the "author" of a film work, in whose hands "great" films could be identified based on consistent and recognizable artistic cues particular to the director; films thus reflected the personality (and the working constraints) of a director. The movement is also significant for choosing "commercial" directors as objects of study. The success of *Psycho* helped cement Hitchcock's status as an "auteur" of film, and, via François Truffaut's *Le Cinéma selon Alfred Hitchcock* (1967, titled in English *Hitchcock* and *Hitchcock/Truffaut*) he was lionized by the rising movement of auteur film criticism. This critical mass would make its way to the states by way of Andrew Sarris's "Notes on Auteur Theory" in *Film Culture* (1962) and *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968*; Hitchcock's critical canonization via the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group was one effect of the fallout.

The second trend in criticism that *Psycho* encouraged can be seen in the utility with which film –especially *Psycho*— lends itself to "psychoanalysis" and the post-Lacanian move towards psychoanalytic criticism of literature and film (a utility begged for in the closing "psychiatric

diagnosis" scenes, wherein Norman's behavior is explained to the audience by a criminal

psychiatrist). Psychoanalytic criticisms generally flourished in the seventies and eighties, and

have long since dominated the critical conversation on Horror film.[82] Important works in this

tradition are Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" and Julia Kristeva's work

on the notion of the abject.[83] *Psycho*, and indeed most horror film, seemed almost designed to

inspire critical questions of gender and identification in film. As Carol Clover explains it, the

first wave of post-*Psycho* horror films in the 1960s and especially the wave of B-picture, drive-in

gross-outs of the seventies and eighties pursue in their subject matter and style a "brazen tack

into the psychosexual wilderness that [makes horror] such a marvelously transparent object of

study…" (Clover 236). Two key concerns of this critical tradition, the mechanics of spectatorial

identification and the concept of the controlling male "gaze" collide in the manipulative

successes of *Psycho*.[84] They are then put to work in *Point Omega*.

   Laura Mulvey attributes most of cinema's attraction to the audience's voyeurism and

scopophilia, the "pleasure of looking." The general pleasure of looking at human bodies is not

only the focus of cinema, but that pleasure is doubled onscreen by the shot-reverse-shot

paradigm of the classical Hollywood narrative; thus, the audience not only receives the pleasure

of looking at the actors, but also reenacts this pleasure when the characters onscreen with whom

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[82]   See for instance Clover, Modleski, Mulvey, Grant, and Schneider.

[83]   The other "usual suspects" might include Robin Wood, Carol Clover, Stephen Neale, Linda

Williams, Barbara Creed.

[84]   Thompson notes for instance Hitchcock's campaign to bar entrance to the film once it had begun, to

omit a press screening to protect the "shock" of Marion's death in the first reel, and Hitchcock's

"excruciatingly skillful" building of suspense and dread in the first forty minutes of the film as examples

of this manipulative streak in "Hitch" (2).

the audience identifies look at one another. This pleasure is one of the constituent parts of the

cinema process itself as the screen image is made possible through the constant, implied gaze of

the camera itself. As the object of all of this looking is most often the female body, and as the

filmmaking industry has long been male dominated, the camera's gaze is thus inscribed as being

inherently male.[85] *Psycho* exemplifies this echo-chamber of voyeurism and of the devouring

male gaze. At the most superficial, we watch a man watching the female body: the characters of

the film are introduced as the camera peers through an open window on the post-coital

conversation of two lovers, Sam (John Gavin) and Marion (Janet Leigh); the audience thus

watches the scantily clad Marion and watches Sam watch her. This gazing continues as Marion is

variously scrutinized by oil tycoon Tom Cassidy, a highway patrolman, and a car salesman. This

voyeurism is heightened to its signature tension, however, when Norman Bates is shown spying

on Leigh at the hotel before the infamous shower scene. The spectator, shown a subjective shot

through the peephole, takes pleasure in looking on Marion and therefore identifies with Norman.

This identification becomes complicated as that gaze turns murderous, and the audience is

implicated in the act of murder. "Predatory gazing through the first-person camera," writes

Clover, "is part of the stock-in-trade of horror" (183).

These issues of identification further complicate the reading of a horror film in questions over

the spectator's identification with characters onscreen: does the audience identify with the victim

or the killer? And does the pleasure really stem from the subjective shots' invitation to murder

and violence, like the famous "mask shots" from *Halloween* (wherein the spectator sees the

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[85]   The sheer volume and variety of global cinema and the rise of digital filmmaking and distribution

may be the answer to this domination, were it one that was not limited to the Hollywood system with

which Mulvey is concerned.

murder through the eyeholes of the killer's mask)? These questions are addressed by Carol

Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, in an argument that will prove critical to understanding

DeLillo's enactment of such "problematic looking" in *Point Omega*. Gender identification (and

by implication psychoanalytic questions of identity formation) becomes a complex game for the

slasher film spectator, she argues. Horror films contain many gender-bending conventions: the

female protagonist assumes a role traditionally reserved for males; the female victim becomes

"phallic" when she turns knives, axes, et al against her attackers; the "performative" tendencies

of the slashers are made transparent when they dress in costume, wear female skin (*Texas*

Chainsaw Massacre, Silence of the Lambs), or act as agents of female retribution (*Friday the*

13th, I Spit On Your Grave). Through these manipulations and mis-identifications, male viewers

are able to identify with the female characters (and the killers and victims) on screen. They thus

receive the doubled pleasure of entertaining repressed desires in the activities of the slasher and

in the temporary identification with a female victim whose body provides a "surrogate" to

weather the castrating and penetrating transgressions of the killer. Castration anxiety in horror

films, she writes,

> may be a far messier and less wholesome business [than action films] … So messy and
>
> unwholesome, in fact, that running it through a woman might be the only way it can be
>
> run. Here we arrive at the politics of displacement: the use of the woman as a kind of
>
> feint, a front through which the boy can simultaneously experience forbidden desires *and*
>
> disavow them on the grounds that the visible actor is, after all, a girl. (Clover 18)

Identification then becomes a complex process of mask-wearing and gender fluidity, dramatized

nicely by Norman's "transformation" into his phallic, avenging mother. All of it is implicated in

the film apparatus, and in Finley we will see both the dangers of predatory gazing and the gender "masks" required to both perform that gaze and to be appropriately punished for it.

The psychoanalytic connection to horror film is not bound solely to feminist or gender criticism, though the genre tends to beg the question of gender in its consistent depictions of retributive violence spurred by sexual activity. The "monsters from the id" which populate horror film from even its earliest manifestations (*Caligari*, *The Wolfman*) embody the repressed, animal id and the anxieties and discontent which arise from the repression thereof; this repression is necessary, Freud argues (for instance in *Civilization and its Discontents),* for the function of human communities. When in that essay he reminds the reader that "man is a wolf to man" (*homo homini lupus*) he does not merely acknowledge the potential for and disposition toward violence in the biological human, but also establishes a model for the disruptive and internal monster which has plagued cinema since its inception.

This eruptive monstrosity has been explored by Douglas Gordon in his video art. In the video *Monster* (1996), Gordon's face becomes grotesque through the application of strips of transparent adhesive tape, which simultaneously transform his face and allow it to stay visible or revealed in their transparency (SFMOMA).
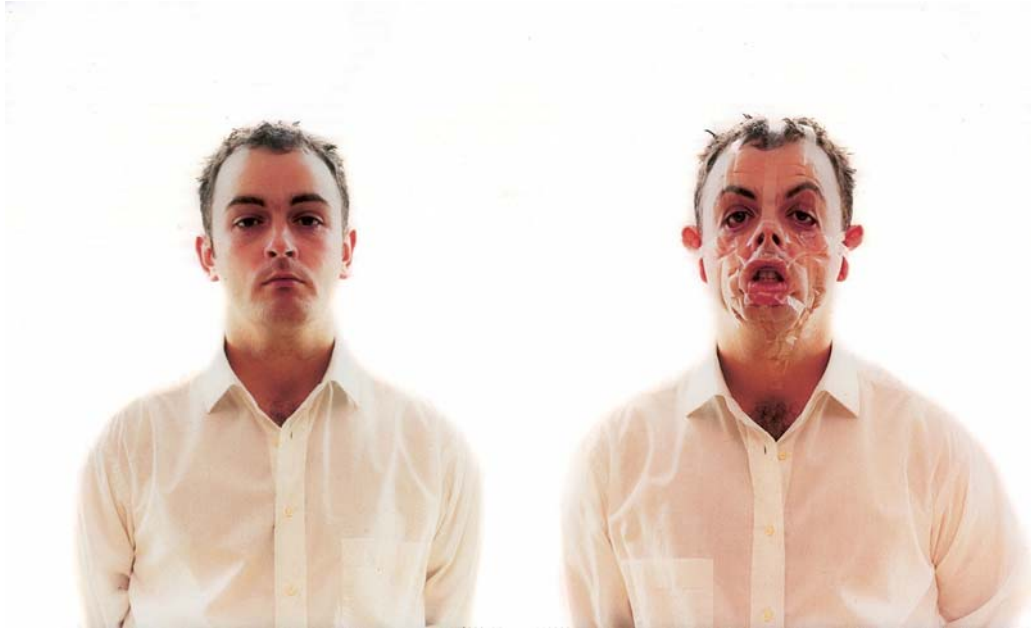
Fig. 9, Gordon's *Monster* (1996)

In two other works, Gordon directly addresses issues of transformation, estrangement, and

embodied duality through a monstrous lens: Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

figures in Gordon's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1995–96), and the video installations *A*

Divided Self I & II, (1996) (Hartley).

DeLillo's oft-noted concern with simulation and questions of "authenticity" are most

obviously addressed here by understanding Gordon's installation.[86] In the actual physical space

of the installation, the video being shown is a commercially available VHS copy of *Psycho*.

Other than omitting the soundtrack and slowing down the frame rate, Gordon has made no other

edits or adjustments to the film. In a way, *24 Hour Psycho* really is just *Psycho*. As Holger

Broeker puts it, the viewer must , when initially beholding Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, grapple

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[86]   See for instance Cowart 2003, Soltan, Hardin, Lentricchia "Aristotle and/or DeLillo," Wilcox, et

cetera.

with establishing how much of the work is "Gordon's" and how much is "Hitchcock's" – or, in a broader sense, how much is "Art" and how much is "Movie" (Broeker 66). Gordon's video is a sustained and derivative dialog with Hitchcock's film as well as an examination of the implied audience's social relationship with Hitchcock's film (and indeed film itself).[87]

DeLillo has staked a career on a similar dialogue. In his investigation of the grammar and language of various electronic media and their vectors of infection across the American cultural landscape, DeLillo's aims are not unlike Gordon's. He is particularly taken with the epistemological issues related to a video-culture, and demonstrates in his work a particular sensitivity to "total flow" that video (and video art) allows. His short story "Videotape" (1994, eventually integrated into *Underworld*) offers a monologic meditation on the medium.

Point Omega also engages the postmodern meta-concern over narration and strategies of narrative. Finlay hopes, for instance, to create a documentary film featuring Elster extemporaneously speaking in front of a brick wall (21). This film will be a follow-up to Finlay's previous short, a random assortment of clips of Jerry Lewis's telethon work, devoid of context, continuity, and chronology, "edited well beyond the limits of information and objectivity and not itself a document" (25).[88] Elster is an object of concern for Finlay because of his involvement as an "outsider" in the creation of an Iraq war narrative, of his bringing new vocabularies to

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[87]   Having a "relationship" with *Psycho* may seem odd, or an error in usage. I will point out as an example, therefore, the David Thompson's recent book /love letter to the film, *The Moment of Psycho*, to which I will refer to repeatedly in this essay. Thompson uses an entire paragraph of his acknowledgments to thank "the film itself" – not Hitchcock, but *the film itself*.

[88]   This is as good a place as any to mention that Thompson offers Jerry Lewis as a cinematic precedent for Norman Bates, "the only other functioning crazy in American film" (16).

"freshen the dialogue" of the administration (36). In less than fifty pages of *Point Omega*,

DeLillo manages to encapsulate most of his broader fictional program: the search for or telling of

"secret" or "popular" histories (a la *Libra*, *Underworld*, etc); the decreasing significance

between simulation (or mediated narrative) and actual lived experience (*White Noise*) and the

inability of language to separate the two registers (or maybe the ability of language to integrate

the two, almost pathologically); the behavior of crowds and mass identities (*Mao II*); issues of

literary form (*Libra*), memory (*The Body Artist*) and time (*Underworld* and everything after). If

one includes in that program the desire to reproduce spoken, lived language and the banality or

perhaps perceived emptiness of contemporary domestic life, then DeLillo's corpus comes to

resemble more and more those various spheres of preoccupation found on the masthead of the

great modernist armada.

   Continuing this engagement with the Modernist "legacy," DeLillo enacts a kind of radical

recasting of the post-Flaubert fascination with what James Wood calls "modern realist

narration": prose that "favors the telling and brilliant detail," "privileges a high degree of visual

noticing," "maintains an unsentimental composure" and withdraws leaving a "traceable but not

visible" narrative voice (Wood 39). DeLillo compares this method to the ritual exposures of the

horror film. "The wish such a horror film fulfills is that of *seeing*," writes Bruce Kawin, and one

is hard pressed not to hear the echo of Conrad's wish to "make one see" – to see "the horror" of

the new.

   Two operations work quietly in DeLillo's opening sequence to explore this comparison. One

is the gradual shift from the voice of the omniscient narrator ("DeLillo," perhaps) into the free-

indirect discourse favoring the perspective of the anonymous spectator. What begins as a very

distant omniscient voice slowly becomes oriented from that spectator's point of view. We begin

with the simple declarative scene-blocking of the narrator: "There was a man standing against the north wall, barely visible. People entered in twos or threes and they stood in the dark and looked at the screen and then they left….The screen was freestanding, about ten by fourteen feet…" (DeLillo 2010, 3). The concern is spatial, factual. (Note that we enter the narrative through the Gordon's floating screen, echoing however subtly the camera's entrance into the plot of *Psycho* through hotel window.) The man standing against the north wall is "ever so slowly" repeating the action of the film being projected on the screen (DeLillo 2010, 3). The man moves from one side of the screen to the other to see the film in reverse, and then the narrative begins to take on his perspective: "He watched Anthony Perkins reaching for a car door, using the right hand. *He knew that Anthony Perkins would use the right hand on this side of the screen and the left hand on the other side*. He knew it but needed to see it…" (4, emphasis added). This scene neatly puns on the image of *projection*, as the narrator eventually begins to assume the anonymous man's perspective and attitudes; in his own obsession with the film, the anonymous spectator begins to assume (to project) an expertise of film and a narrative of film scholarship and criticism onto two anonymous men who enter the screening space. "He watched them a moment longer, the academics, adepts of film, of film theory, film syntax, film and myth, the dialectics of film, the metaphysics of film, as Janet Leigh began to undress for the blood-soaked shower to come" (8). This is really just a litany of academic-sounding phrases run in succession, bereft of any significant connectors or meaning. Excised of any fruitful content, they not only expose the lone spectator's own sustained obsession/fascination with the film but also act on the language of film criticism in the same way Gordon's film radically decontextualizes *Psycho* by removing sound. He has spent at least three hours of his day watching the film, and it is his fifth consecutive day watching. As he imagines himself "seeing with the actor's eyes" he becomes

more and more identified with the perspective of Norman, the film's murderous star. He

ameliorates his obsession as into academic interest and projects that interest onto two strangers.

Throughout this section, the fascination with and amplification of voyeurism in the original

film dominates the language:

> Everybody was watching something. He was watching the two men, they were watching
>
> the screen, Anthony Perkins at his peephole was watching Janet Leigh undress. …he was
>
> eager to watch again…he knew that the two men at the adjacent wall would also be
>
> watching intently. He felt that they shared something, we three, that's how he felt. It was
>
> the rare kind of fellowship that singular events engender, even if the others didn't know
>
> he was there. (DeLillo 2010, 8-9)

DeLillo manages in these opening pages to amplify these instances of doubling (*Psycho/24 Hour*

Psycho; lone spectator/pair of spectators; watching Norman/ watching Marion, etc) and

projection (psychological and optical) while in combination with the "guilty pleasures" of the

films being invoked. This aggregation/refraction of ways-of-seeing casts the act of narration in

the modern realist novel as an expression of neurosis. The "modern" preoccupation with multiple

perspectives and internal plentitude has been prolonged, through the abstraction of video, into a

ritual of bloodletting: the day long "journey" through language of *Ulysses* and the internal

examination of a "day in the life" of Clarissa Dalloway have been literalized by Gordon into a

day-long horror. The legacy of the modern is one of solipsism (the lone spectator's), violent

misidentification (Norman's), and the slow march towards a horizon of silence (Gordon's).

A final irony (or perhaps in-joke) of this examination is that the lone spectator, in his reverie,

can no longer picture what he looks like as anything other than "what his mother saw when she

looked at him" (8). Alert readers will see here the dots connecting this existential musing and the

great incidental pun Norman makes in *Psycho* when he tells Marion "my mother isn't herself today." The lone spectator's (and, by extension, the narrator's) identification with Gordon's *24 Hour* Norman Bates is coming to fruition: "But his mother had passed on. This raised a question for advanced students. What was left of him for others to see?" (8). In the wake of *Psycho*, there is almost nothing left hidden from the spectator except for that which was pre-*Psycho*. *Psycho* itself remains only as a memory rather than a historical gesture, a once eruptive text now a fixture of the "master narrative" of cinema and the film apparatus itself, stretched out across the limits of a human day consisting almost entirely of the mediated, narrative spaces and contested narratives of normalcy, control, and immortality that had once been the very motion of the planet itself.

This helps explain why Elster and Finlay – and DeLillo – flee "down a primitive trail" to Elster's house in the desert after meditating upon the prolonged anticipation of terror in the Gordon installation (DeLillo 2010, 21). Elster wants to escape the noise of the city, but Finlay's description of the "geologic time" they encounter in the desert is haunted by the creeping totality of the video: "It was one seamless day, every day, until the sun began to arc and fade, mountains emerging from their silhouettes. This is when we sat and watched in silence" (36). This passage calls to mind Jameson's comparison of the flattening of historic consciousness in globalized capitalism to a science fictional, otherworldly landscape: the stronger the case is made that *the past* is "merely an intellectual construct of the present," than the more inevitable is "our entry into a Parmenidean realm in which some eternal system reigns around us like a noon beyond time only faintly perfumed with the odor of heated plants and informed by the echo of cicadas and the distant and incomprehensible memory of death" (Jameson 2006, 89).

Horror Politics and Political Horror

Upon Jessie's arrival at Elster's desert retreat, Finlay assumes the predatory gaze that had previously been the lone spectator's (and Norman's and the camera's all along). This turn in Finlay should not surprise the reader, as he has pursued Elster into the desert in an effort to "shoot him" in a documentary style exercise in cinema, and in fact met Elster after following him around a museum observing him and his engagement with the exhibits. Finlay's documentary would consist of Elster's standing in front of a wall, speaking extemporaneously and uninterrupted, without off-camera prompts or inserted war footage or sound. Elster hints at the predatory nature of Finlay's thesis when he suggests that the scene of the film —"up against the wall"— has the violent overtones of counter-revolutionary law enforcement of the sixties. "He said 'Up against the wall, motherfucker,' and gave me a hard look. 'Except the sixties are long gone and there are no more barricades'" (45). Comforting Finlay after this confrontational exchange, Jessie wonders why an audience would want to devote attention to something so "zombielike," hinting at both the horror-film overtones of the Finlay's project and the threat of death which surrounds it (46).[89]

As Elster continues his non-committal stalling about the project, and continues to lecture and expound on his views of the desert, death, time, and the war, Finlay slowly begins to turn his attention to Jessie: "I liked these talks, they were quiet, with eerie depth in every stray remark she made. I stared at her sometimes, waiting for what, a return look, a show of discomfort…

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[89]   When the similarity of Finlay's project to Gordon's video is mentioned, Jessie tells Finlay that Elster described watching *24 Hour Psycho* as "like watching the universe die over a period of about seven billion years" (47).

Hers was another life, nowhere near mine, and it offered a release from the constant self-tunneling of my time here and also a kind of balance to her father's grip on my immediate future" (DeLillo 42). He hopes his gaze alone will provoke a reaction from her, as his unobtrusive portrait of Elster might similarly unfold, but he is inconsequential to her. At first finding her bland, plain, and awkward, her lack of interest in Finlay becomes more and more attractive to him, and his gaze quickens and becomes more intrusive, ascribing to her aspects of the dead and the supernatural: "She was sylphlike, her element was air… She moved through places with a soft glide, feeling the same things everywhere, this is what there was, *the space within*. …Her bed was never made. I opened the door and looked several times but did not enter" (49, emphasis added). Finlay, while beginning to identify with Jessie or at least fantasize about her body, makes special emphasis of "the space within." Clover notes the usefulness of staging slasher films with a female victim because the male audience would naturally associate horror with a female body, "the metaphoric architecture of which, with its enterable but unseeable inner space, has for so long been a fixture in the production of the uncanny" (Clover 18).

Finlay becomes bolder, watching her at the washbasin one morning, allowing himself to be seen by her as he watches her. One night when they are alone talking on the deck he holds her hand. Finally, Finlay "crosses the threshold" into Jessie's room one night:

> there was a space between the door and the jamb and I eased open the door and stood there… it took some time before I realized she was looking at me. She was under the bed sheet looking straight at me and then she turned on her side and faced the far wall, pulling the sheet up to her neck. …Another moment passed before I drew the door quietly back to its original position." (DeLillo 74).

Whether this crossing over is an imposition or not remains a mystery, and not only because

Finlay does not make an overt sexual advance on Jessie. Finlay is, after all, a looker, impotent,

and the only telos for his looking is more looking. The earlier moments of refracted or doubled

looking from the art gallery/video installation are herein repeated, as is the iconic scene of

invasive looking by Norman upon Marion at the Bates Motel.

The next day Elster and Finlay go to the market for supplies, and when they return Jessie has

disappeared, presumably into the desert but perhaps a victim of a violent crime. Police find a

knife, unbloodied, and Jessie's mother fears foul play at the hands of an unknown romantic

interest of Jessie's who has been apparently either her secret lover or is "stalking" her.

Finlay now has Elster to himself again, but the father's shock and grief renders the

documentary film moot. So Finlay's transgression, intruding into Jessie's (and Elster's) space,

may have destroyed his attempt to capture that intimacy (or inspired Jessie to flee). It is possible

too that, according to the logic of horror film, Finlay is punished for his voyeurism, or that Jessie

is punished for returning Finlay's gaze and therefore assuming/appropriating the male-dominated

point-of-view. As mentioned above, slasher films complicate notions of screen identification,

with audiences ostensibly identifying with both attacker (male) and victim (female). The Female

victim acts as "a male surrogate in things oedipal, a homoerotic stand-in, the audience

incorporate… [she] is simply an agreed-upon fiction and the male viewer's use of her as a

vehicle for his own sadomasochistic fantasies as an act of perhaps timeless dishonesty" (Clover

53). Finlay adopts the camera's predatory gaze, and the overt layering of *Psycho* begins to imply,

by generic expectation, that some terrible violence is to occur, or that Finlay will suffer some

retributive or emasculating attack for awakening his repressed desires (and actively provoking

them in his voyeurism). To fulfill these generic expectations, Jessie becomes the victim-

surrogate; Finlay is allowed to continue in his pursuit of Elster (and even takes a more active role to his previously passive one, cutting Elster's hair, coordinating with law enforcement, calling relatives, et cetera while Elster retreats in an impotent suffering).

Clover suggests that audiences enjoy horror films because of these fluid identification opportunities. But let us consider Bruce Kawin's explanation of "the pleasures of terror," wherein the spectator "goes to a horror film in order to have a nightmare—not simply a frightening dream, but a dream whose undercurrent of anxiety both presents and masks the desire *to fulfill and be punished for conventionally or personally unacceptable impulses*" (Kawin 680, emphasis added). This notion of wish fulfillment and punishment can help expose Jessie's mysterious disappearance. In one way Finlay here embodies the "unconventional impulse" of scopophilia and voyeurism, one that completely dominates his life (and DeLillo's characterization of him, as above). But, perhaps, it is Elster who is being punished (and not Finlay or Jessie) for a different wish. In much the same way that Hitchcock sets up Marion for her climactic murder, DeLillo has slowly characterized Elster in unflattering ways. He has, for the majority of the work, postured as an all-knowing intellectual, an academic windbag of the worst sort (and lampooned previously by DeLillo in the guise of cultural studies professors Murray Siskind and Jack Gladney in *White Noise*), selfishly lapping at the attention of Finlay while refusing to commit to his film project, and using Finlay's visit as an opportunity to lecture. He furthers this self-centered opportunism by projecting his own sense of self and his self-adoration onto his daughter, with whom he is now competing for attention from Finlay. "She was her father's dream thing," Finlay observes, "He didn't seem baffled by her stunted response to his love. It was natural for him not to notice. I'm not sure he understood the fact that she was not him" (56). Worse, Elster has avoided responsibility for his part in the Iraq war and his role as an

advisor for the war committees. He was brought in as "an individual… of interdisciplinary range, a man of reputation who might freshen the dialogue, broaden the viewpoint," and performed such a role for two years (36). In his desire to justify the war and his participation in authoring its official language, Elster portrays his work with the Pentagon as a study in poetics, his war at an attempt at creating *haiku*:

> Haiku means nothing beyond what it is. A pond in summer, a leaf in the wind. It's human consciousness located in nature. It's the answer to everything in a set number of lines, a prescribed syllable count. I wanted a haiku war… I wanted a war in three lines… What I wanted was a set of ideas linked to transient things. This is the soul of haiku. Bare everything to plain sight… See what's there and then be prepared to watch it disappear.
> (DeLillo 29)

In this meditation on form, Elster rehearses Kawin's explanation of the horror film as a "wish to see" in his [Elster's] desire to have the war made bare but also in his desire for authorial grandiosity. This desire for "a war in three lines" also shows how adeptly DeLillo uses *24 Hour Psycho* as a frame device. What could possibly stand in grander opposition to the ephemeral and transient precision of the haiku but a sprawling, day-long gesture of prolonged manipulation? And if haiku relies on immediate, fleeting, and seasonal context ("what is *there*") to create meaning, than *24 Hour Psycho* stands in perfect opposition, a radically decontextualized anti-monument to film that betrays its connections to the human life-world and elongates and mortifies what had previously been an explosive and singular film event into an "eerie experience of protracted anticipation" rather than a narrative with any type of closure (Hansen 592).

Elster had, when viewing *24 Hour Psycho* with Finlay at MoMA, "resisted" the film and fled

after ten minutes. Finlay supposed it is that the "Stillborn images and collapsing time" of the

video "left him no clear context to dominate" (61). But it may have been that the sheer scope and

length of the piece was not only the opposite in form to what Elster had wished for with the

pentagon, but also that its immensity and seemingly endless duration reminded him of what the

Pentagon had actually created in the place of haiku: perpetual war. I do not necessarily mean

here the perpetual war described by Srinivas Aravamudan as one that "transverses the historical

record" and is perhaps as Heraclitus argues "an original and universal human condition" (1505).

I mean rather both the "hot" and "cold" wars currently taking place in the so-called War on

Terror as provoked by the World Trade Center attacks in 2001. The United States entered (and

indeed "authored") this most recent and official state of war in response to the trauma of the

September 11th attacks, and it has continued for almost a decade (military operations against

Afghanistan begin October 2001; Iraq was officially invaded by coalition forces 2003). The

trauma of the world trade center attacks – a trauma that DeLillo has made a central concern in his

writing ever since– has been elongated and made to seem endless, an ideological "war on terror"

that can never have an end because there is no longer any "future" other than war. [90] Elster

hoped for a haiku but instead co-authored an endless narrative of "priorities, statistics,

evaluations, rationalizations" (30). He created a monster.

Therefore, true to the politics of horror film (and Clover's model of victim-surrogacy), Elster's

punishment is visited upon a female body. Jessie becomes the victim-body upon which Elster's

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[90]   See DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future."

wish for punishment can be enacted.[91] Gordon's video, with its "suspension of causality" and

erasure of time signatures is a perfect expression of this perpetual war and of Elster's refusal to

accept responsibility (Broeker 68). In his privileging of "body parts and split and superimposed

identities," Gordon's video work also resuscitates and refines the splintering and disruptive work

of slashers, monsters, and the video-horrors that contain them (Morse 22). So the "plot"

disintegrates (what happened to Jessie? Will Elster appear in Finlay's film?) into a meditation

on the endless horror and anonymous, state-sanctioned violence that perpetual war allows.

Paul Fussell observed a similar imaginative prominence of *perpetual* and *endless war* in

British literature after World War I: "In a world where myth is of no avail and where traditional

significance has long ago been given up for lost, time of day doesn't matter" (Fussell 58). He

writes

> One did not have to be a lunatic or a particularly despondent visionary to conceive quite
>
> seriously that the war would literally never end and would become the permanent
>
> condition of mankind. The stalemate and attrition would go on infinitely, becoming, like
>
> the telephone and the internal combustion engine, a part of the accepted atmosphere of
>
> the modern experience. Why indeed not, given the palpable irrationality of the new
>
> world? Why not, given the vociferous contempt with which peace plans were received by
>
> the patriotic majorities on both sides? (Fussell 71)

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[91]   Clover asserts that the substitution of a female body for a male victim fantasy is necessary "to

protect" the male viewers; it is unclear which male spectator DeLillo's feint manages to protect: Elster,

Finlay, or DeLillo himself.

This endless war paradigm is thus another reckoning on DeLillo's part of the modern legacy, a legacy which has come more and more to indicate the cultural "awakenings" caused by technological innovations in senseless human bloodshed (Fussell 58).

Jameson, discussing the "radical otherness" required of science fictional alien bodies, notes that Homer, unable to imagine any truly "new" monster, created the Chimera out of the parts of existing animals: the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent. Jameson uses the problem of the Chimera here to illustrate the imaginative limitations of ideology; on the social level, the alleged inability to imagine true otherness means that "our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production (and perhaps to whatever remnants of past ones it has preserved)" (Jameson 2006: xiii). Our monsters, it would follow, reflect that captivity. *Point Omega* deploys a previously existing monster (Norman Bates and *Psycho*) that has simply been cast in a different light or whose constituent parts have been re-arranged to suggest a new mode, a break with the previous one. But it is only a suggestion, and while this new "perpetual war" may only be the institutionalization of a part of human nature, it nevertheless has come to dominate our cultural anxieties and "repressed impulses." *Point Omega* is fallout from almost a decade of constant, prolonged, ideological warfare, and can imagine no exit from that seamless abstraction. In that opposition to the utopian wish of *American Psycho*—that a seamless document of hegemonic control might offer an opportunity for escape via fantasies of monstrosity—*Point Omega* wraps its open-ended plot in the abstracting, decontextualization of a never-ending war for which there appears to be no escape except in anonymous oblivion.[92]

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[92]   Cowart may disagree here, as he offers DeLillo's language use as a "site of resistance" to the "terror of postmodern life" (Cowart 5). I do not find evidence of this in *Point Omega*.

CHAPTER VI:

SOME CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to identify the ways in which late-modern and post-modern novels access the

discourses of monster movies (and by extension horror film); in so identifying, I assert that the

cinematic image of the monster is a truly integral part of the modernist legacy. And though I

have chosen works that overtly address the cinematic monstrous –works that hail these films and

this tradition by name—it is the preoccupation with from in monstrous novel which tethers it to

works like *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Pound's *Cantos*. Because these

modernist works have come to be "classics," the monstrous novel must take on more and more

threatening and "horrific" formal qualities if it is to challenge the stability of literary fiction.

Nightwood is the most direct link to the modernist *zeitgeist,* a proto-monstrous novel, a mutant or

hybrid that establishes literary precedent for authors like Pynchon to deploy figures and forms

which may have been formerly the domain of the grotesque (the disfigured or disgusting which

also incites empathy). That grotesquery, absorbed into the spectacular bodies of the cinematic

monstrous, forms a powerful literary node of meaning which has become a mythic "armature" or

structure for postmodern and posthuman art in the same way that Roman fragments and epic

poetry provided literary templates and organizational patterns for high modernism.

The formal qualities of the monstrous novel in concert with the overt gestures towards

monster movies in what we will call their "content" suggest a genre with identifiable traits: as we

saw in the introduction, the monstrous novel is often encyclopedic in scope or method, though differing of course in the "intrinsic formal qualities"; the monstrous novel is combinatory in narrative style, register, language, "media," form; it examines and includes cinematic monsters and the monstrous body as subjects, agents and characters, often in a meditation on form; depends upon monstrous narratives and monster movies as narrative armatures or sources (rather than the mythic or epic-heroic narratives which are parodied by the encyclopedic novel); the monstrous novel is overtly concerned with issues of narrative embodiment and agency, simultaneously displaying expertise on film, video, comics, and other para-literary fiction methods, forms, and media; as I argue above, it grapples with the modernist tradition and legacy and/or subverts the "modern realist novel" as a bourgeois object. Finally, the monstrous novel privileges hybridity, transformation, informational orientation, and in this way it predicts and prepares the epistemological shift toward posthuman subjectivity.[93] Monstrous novels also tend to deliberately challenge notions of readability, or at least seem to deliberately provoke the reader with text that revels in excess wordage, repulsive or abject material, or a subversion of generic convention (*American Psycho* best exemplifies this trait).

Perhaps then a monstrous novel is part of literary culture inseparable from the greater "standing order" of non-monstrous novels since the advent of cinema. Like movie monsters, the monstrous novel cane be viewed as a "return of the repressed," wherein that which is repressed is

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[93]   I have tried to show elsewhere the relationship between the body-horror film and what we can call "posthuman anxiety," that is, on the waxing realization of the body as simply a material substrate in which intelligence takes form, and on the tendency to express this anxiety in Humanist "nostalgia for the body" and for narratives of techno-phobia, both of which complicate notions of genre and of the mind-body. See my "Posthuman Anxiety and *28 Days Later*" in *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*.

a savage or vicious desire to destroy literary standards (*Gravity's Rainbow*) literary commerce (*Day of the Locust*) and literary propriety (*American Psycho*) The desire for literature to be a destabilizing rather than stabilizing cultural artifact. Alternately, the monstrous novel may be, instead of a literary "monument" to achievement, the repulsive "other" against which a national literature can define itself.

For the sake of limiting scope, I have omitted from this study several works and authors who nevertheless have created works which also call upon the cinematic-monstrous to enable their literary modernisms. William Faulkner, for instance, deserves some mention here, least not for their depictions of gigantism (e.g. the giant animals of "The Bear"), their preoccupation with biological monsters (Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*) and demonic half-men (Sutpen the "man/horse/demon" of *Absalom, Absalom*!) and their general literary excess. Between 1932 and 1955, Faulkner accumulated over four years living in and writing for Hollywood; while occupied off and on with various writing assignments for Howard Hawks and Warner Brothers, Faulkner also wrote, among other titles, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1937) and *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (1942). Less well known from this period are two screenplays and film treatments for Hawks: a "Jekyll and Hyde" picture called *Fog Over London* (1949) and an unproduced vampire picture called *Dreadful Hollow* (c. 1944-46). Faulkner also worked with Tod Browning, director of *London After Midnight* (1927), *Dracula* (1931), *Freaks* (1932), *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), *and The Devil-Doll* (1936). [94]

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[94]   In an interview about his work for MGM, Faulkner spoke about "director Browning"; this was most probably during his attachment to the picture *Lazy River* (1934), for which Browning was an uncredited director of photography (Dardis 97-98).

I might also have included Joan Didion, whose collections *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1972) resist categorization and frequently revel in the doom-soaked, post-Utopian 1960s Western landscape that calls forth what Ben Hervey called the "gory" death-throes of the 1960s: the murders at Altamont, the Manson family murders, and the Kent State and Jackson State shootings (Hervey 23). More explicitly gory and horrific are her essays on political unrest and military violence in *Salvador* (1983). Cormac McCarthy, a writer unmistakably involved in generic re-appraisal (e.g. the anti-western *Blood Meridian*, along the western-westerns of *The Border Trilogy*) operates soundly in the realm of seventies exploitation and horror in novels like *Child of God* (1974), *Suttree* (1979),[95] and in the post-apocalyptic zombie mode in *The Road* (2006).[96]

Finally, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* exemplifies the monstrous novel: a monstrously formed literary work that is somehow engaged simultaneously in the project of assembling a challenging and deliberately "literary" work with the low sensibility that would somehow use monster-movies and horror-film as an emblem for both that process of that engagement and the engagement itself. His novel turns not only on the search for a lethal video tape –prescient of

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[95]   Coincidentally, *Suttree* was published a year after *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and prominently features graveyards, innards, and the shambling gait attributed to zombies pre-2000s; and *Child of God* was published the same year as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and both prominently feature necrophilia and the wearing of human remains. There is more to be said here.

[96]   McCarthy's novel does not feature actual zombies, but in as much as that monster is archetypically associated with "cannibalism" and "apocalypse" and features both spit-roasted fetuses and shambling gangs of human ghouls, *The Road* is nevertheless deeply centered in zombie territory. The "wife," in flashback, even remarks to "the man," that "We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film." (McCarthy 57).

horror film tropes of "haunted media" seen later in films like the Japanese *Ringu* (1998) and

Kairo ("Pulse*,*" 2002)— but also populates that search with a parade of monstrously-formed

bodies; moreover its own formal excesses (chronologically discontinuous, dependent upon

digressive and highly technical footnotes and embedded footnotes, gargantuan in size, fitted of

incommensurate pieces, etc) mark it as a monstrous form in and of itself.

At the intersection of the novel and the moving picture, one can witness how the imperative to

"make it new" came to resemble Victor Frankenstein's "workshop of filthy creation." We can

trace an arc of anxiety and monstrosity in the works of those post-modern authors who directly

engage with the historical break that modernism claims to have inaugurated. *Frankenstein* is the

posthuman equivalent of myth, a "legendary" image of creation originating not from the divine

or magical but from the technological and industrial. Frankenstein and his creature are mythical

figures for our culture, and their own vehicle of creation, Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, furthers

this role by going through a series of its own transformations into various adaptations and

mediated forms, mutating into a network of narrative possibility, evolving across forms as

disparate as the novel, drama, graphic narrative, and a host of sequels, rubber masks, holiday

cartoons and TV sitcoms. *The Day of the Locust* internalizes this narrative network of

Frankenstein, *pre*-supposing that network's later manifestations. Dialectically speaking, *Locust*

reaches backwards in time to assimilate Shelley's *Frankenstein* as it awaits Whale's film, and all

the while this network anticipates the future forms of Frankenstein's creature as an archetype for

the posthuman, cyborg-embodied androids of post-war science fiction.

Once language is disconnected from the "natural" world (via the linguistic "intervention" of

semiotics and structuralism as inspired by Saussure), issues of readership and spectatorship arise:

whereas language had once been observed as a living system that evolved in a dynamic cycle of

rise and fall (the modernist biological model in the tradition of ideological narratives like Spengler's *The Decline of the West*), the shift of language to a mechanical system of syntax and semantics lead to the notion of language as a structure of difference. Speakers and listeners became language "users," and then various publics and readerships; alongside this change developed a cinema spectator from what had been simply an audience. The latter was specialized from a previously heterogeneous mass into subsets and markets, and regions, from passive consumers into active components in a film apparatus. Thus language and its speakers become data and its users; from the ashes of post-structuralism springs the posthuman, an epistemological shift that results in the privileging of information and data over meaning and subjectivity.[97] The cinematic-monstrous creates an allegorical space in which literature can reconcile its modernist "roots" with its posthuman "branches." This embodiment of formal conflict is palpable in the literally gigantic tomes of the labyrinthine or encyclopedic novel arriving at the moment of high modernity (*Ulysses*) traveling through the convolutions of late modernism (*Absalom, Absalom!*, *USA*) and reappearing in the dense polymers of postmodern rhizomaticity (*Gravity's Rainbow*) and formal excess and exhaustion (*American Psycho*).

Cohen describes *fin de siècle* America as a society that has institutionalized "ambient fear": "This anxiety manifests itself symptomatically as a cultural fascination with monsters—a fixation that is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens."[98] In the standing order of this-or-that literary canon, the monstrous modernisms examined in this dissertation threaten standing

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[97]   See N. Kathryn Hales, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.*

[98]   Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory.*

order both because of their "sacred" modernist genealogy but also because of their "defiled" intercourse with low-brow genre cinema. It is this very duality or fusion of identities which mark the works as monstrous to begin with, just as it is the physical creatures and horrors of popular imagination which, seeping down through the atmosphere of cultural production, help determine both the form and the content of these novels.

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